

S E R M O N S

PREACHED BEFORE

THE HONOURABLE SOCIETIES

OF THE

INNER AND MIDDLE TEMPLE.

BY THE LATE

K
WILLIAM STAFFORD DONE, D. D.

PREBENDARY OF LINCOLN, AND ARCHDEACON
OF BEDFORD.

PUBLISHED

BY THE REV. R. SHEPHERD, B. D. F. R. S.

ARCHDEACON OF BEDFORD.

L O N D O N :

PRINTED FOR W. FLEXNEY, CORNER OF
SOUTHAMPTON BUILDINGS, HOLBORN.

M.DCC.LXXXVI.

26/6/46

STERMONS

THE HONOURABLE SOCIETY

INNER AND MIDDLE TEMPLE



WILLIAM STERMON

RECTOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

17/6/46

TO THE

RIGHT REVEREND THOMAS,

Lord Bishop of LINCOLN.

MY LORD,

PERMIT me to place the following Discourses under your Lordship's protection. Various are the motives concurrent in this request. It is the protection, to which the Author, had he lived himself to submit them to the Public, would have looked up: it is the protection, which they in a still more especial manner claim, as owing their very existence to your Lordship; who called the
 Author

Author from an obscure station to a sphere, which required the first abilities, and gave ample scope to the display of them. And the satisfaction, with which the learned Societies, to whom they were addressed, received so judicious an appointment, appears in the desire several individuals have expressed to read those Discourses, which they had with pleasure and instruction heard.

To these motives, my Lord, to the honour I solicit for the present publication, I have also personal obligations to add : to which the smaller my pretensions, the more happy I am in an opportunity thus publicly to acknowledge them. A return this, however inadequate,
 your

your Lordship's known candour will, I am sure, favourably accept; because it is the only one in my power to offer : who am, with due respect for that benevolence and humanity which characterise your Lordship's conduct, for that condescension in the highest sphere which attaches those in the lowest,

My LORD,

Your Lordship's dutiful,

and most obliged

humble servant,

R. SHEPHERD,

10 EE 60

ADVERTISEMENT.

*D*ID the Editor apprehend the present publication required an apology; he might shelter his own judgment in offering it to the world, under the appointment of the author. But he cannot think so humbly of the following Discourses, as to conceive the necessity of such a plea: nor will the taste of the age, which hath readily listened to similar lessons of virtue and instruction, bear it.

Dr. Blair's Sermons possess a considerable degree of merit: and the reception, the world has given them, does ample justice to their claim. Mr. White's Discourses have exhausted the subject, on which they were employed; and received just marks of publick approbation. And the Sermons of the Bishop of Chester, which through the understanding make their way to the heart,

heart, the Road that Discourses from the Pulpit should take, are in every hand, and merit every praise.

The nature of the Discourses, now offered to the Public, is happily adapted to the audience, before whom they were preached; Men of Learning, who are in the constant habit of pursuing arguments, of detecting falsehood, and investigating truth. They are chiefly argumentative: and if the arguments sometimes appear too abstracted, even when most abstruse, they discover in the Author a full possession of his subject. They are always ingenious; and if not always new, his method of producing them makes them peculiarly his own. There is a singularity in the stile, which every Reader may not approve: but those, who knew him best, know it is not laboured or affected; it was the language of his familiar letters, and in some measure, even of his ordinary conversation.

But

But whatever may be their imperfections, the Editor, who is sensible they are more than would have appeared had the Author lived to set his finishing hand to them, still in confidence that they are calculated to do good, cheerfully submits them to the Public. To his care and trust the selection was committed; and whatever errors of inadvertency may be noticed in it, to himself he takes the blame. The Author is now happily seated above the reachings of ambition, and the tinkling of fame: where human praise and censure are of equal avail; where if

“ *Mortales tangant cœlestia Pectora Curæ.*”

10 FEB 60

he may, perhaps, with satisfaction look down on the efforts of friendship, to render his labour of good works as extensively productive of good fruits as may be: fruits consecrated to the honour of God, by promoting the knowledge of Him; and conducive to the happiness of mankind, by the inculcation of religious truth.

S E R M O N I.

Pf. cxlv.—17.

*The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy
in all his works.*

THOUGH the nature of God be SERMON
I.
a pure, uncompounded essence, and
though the actions of God flow from
one undivided principle; yet in con-
sidering his attributes we are accus-
tomed, from the defect of a finite under-
standing which cannot conceive things
very complex or abstracted, to assign them
a separate subsistence, to sort them into se-
veral arrangements, and to distinguish them
by peculiar denominations. The truth is,
B our

SERMON

I.



our descriptions of the Supreme Being, or his Attributes, are not drawn from any direct or immediate perceptions of him, or of them, but from analogy; from notions formed of his works by observation or fancy, and from the consideration of those faculties or qualities, which we perceive would enable or dispose us, if acting perfectly, to act similarly. Whence, as there are in the human mind several powers and dispositions, which admit of a separate and distinct survey; powers adapted to several operations, and dispositions corresponding to several schemes of conduct: we are apt to suppose, in the divine mind, a similar distinction of powers and dispositions, though they all center in one indivisible principle; and to denominate them variously, though they differ only as they are exerted, on this or that occasion, upon different objects or with different effects. Such is the origin of those general perfections assigned to God under the title of Attributes; and such is the distinction of those moral ones in particular, adjudged to

S E R M O N.

3

to him in the text, Justice and Holiness: SERMON
I.
between which there is, in truth, no essential difference; both necessarily coexisting; holiness or purity including justice, and justice or impartiality implying holiness. They are, however, in our conception separable, and differ, as universal and particular, or abstract and relative; one denoting the rectitude of his nature, the other his integrity in his dispensations; one referring to him as a good being, the other as a good governor:

Let us consider them therefore in the order, in which the text hath stated them.—And,

I. He “is righteous, or just, in all his ways.”—Justice is, as intimated, the quality, by which He orders and disposes things according to the rules of infinite reason, and governs mankind with an exactly proportioned distribution of rewards and punishments. That this may be conceived, let it be observed, that right and wrong

SERMON
I.

have a real and fixed difference in nature: that right is, in an intelligent being, the natural motive to action, where nothing irregular interposeth; and that, whenever it is not made the rule of action, it can only be, either because the agent is ignorant of what is right, or wants ability to pursue it; or else is knowingly and wilfully diverted from it by the hope of some good, or the fear of some evil. Of these causes of injustice none can possibly have place in God: He must be therefore "righteous in all his ways."

But the argument may be more clearly understood perhaps by being less abstractedly considered; by being brought home to what passes within our own observation. Men may be sensible of the moral obligations of justice; yet in many cases not perceive the reasons on which they hinge, or perceive them with an unwillingness to be determined by them. Human Justice finds much obstruction for want of evidence; facts being often obscure,

scure, circumstances doubtful, allegations SERMON
presumptive, and testimonies inconsistent. I.

Or, where evidence is complete, the intricacy of a case, the specious appearance of probability on both sides, may render the merits of it impervious. And even, farther, where men have capacity to understand, what the rules of justice prescribe; they have yet too frequently other rules of their own, more efficacious in the direction of their choice than those which justice inculcates. Worldly considerations may prevail with them to pervert judgment, prejudices of hatred or favour, friendship or relation, partiality to some interest or valued purpose, the solicitations of superiors, or the fascination of bribery, may blind their eyes, and make them accepters of persons in their judicial administrations. But God, the All-wise, the Independent, the Almighty One, must be inaccessible to all these little sinister influences. He, who perfectly knows the rule of equity, and necessarily judges of things as they really are; who hath complete

SERMON

I.



plete ability to execute what is right and fit according to that knowledge, and no possible temptation to deviate in the least degree from it; who can neither be misled by any deceit, nor moved by any bias, nor awed by any power:—such a being must evidently act always, without iniquity, without partiality, without prejudice, without respect of persons; i. e. according to the suggestion of the text, “in all his ways righteously.”

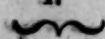
II. He must likewise be “holy in all his works.” Holiness denotes, in a general sense, a freedom from all impurity; but, when assigned to God, it implies that peculiar eminence of his nature, which separates and removes it, at an infinite distance, from all moral imperfection, or what we call sin. Whatever design involves vice, whatever quality implies a moral defect; his holiness signifies, that he is not only devoid of it, but possessed of the contrary perfection in an infinite extent. This presiding attribute, as I will call

call it, may be illustrated by the same train SERMON
I.
of proof with the former. He, who hath 
will with reason, must be a moral agent :
he, who hath reason in the highest and most
perfect degree, must be, in the highest
and most perfect degree, a moral agent :
he, who is above every temptation to be
bad, must be uniformly good : in other
words, he who hath an infinite understand-
ing with an unbiaſſed will, must always per-
ceive the best motives, and act conforma-
bly ; that is, must be “ holy in all his
works.”

And, indeed, we can hardly entertain
any tolerable notion of God ; unless we se-
parate from him whatever is liable to de-
base his nature or actions. We may con-
ceive him infinite in majesty, infinite in es-
sence, infinite in duration, mighty in power,
wise in counsels, and merciful in his pro-
ceedings : we may array him with what-
ever other perfections may be thought to
brighten and dignify a sovereign being :
but if at the same time we allow him desti-

SERMON

I.



rute of this further excellence, and accessible to the contagion of evil; we leave him unadorable, and sully all the other prerogatives ascribed to him: according to the well-known saying of a celebrated ancient, “that he should account himself less injured, by a denial, that there was ever such a man as Plutarch, than by an acknowledgment of his existence, with an annexed disparagement of his character.”

III. But if God be, as described, just; why doth he permit the prosperity of the wicked? Ought not He, who is an upright distributor of good and evil, to distinguish him who serveth him, from him who serveth him not; the former by perceptible recompences of favour, the latter by perceptible visitations of punishment? Most certainly, sooner or later; but not, by necessary consequence, immediately. Having intended the present world for a state of trial, in which obedience is to be proved, and moral inclinations are to be brought into display, by temptation and exercise; how

how could He properly accomplish this purpose without an unequal distribution of what we call prosperity? How could we have any certainty of a future judgment: for, in truth, what occasion would there be for it, if every thing were adjusted and apportioned here with visible exactness and instant effect? Let it then satisfy us, that there may be good reasons, why He holds the scourge of the wicked for a while in suspension, to employ them instrumentally, for instance, in his schemes of punishment; or, in general, to shew his mercy by forbearance, and render penitence available, or impenitence inexcusable: let us rest assured that a decisive and distinguishing period will infallibly arrive, in which all the inequalities of present dispensations will be rectified, in which virtue will have no cause to complain, nor vice to glory, in which the one will reach its goal, and the other terminate in misery.

IV. Another objection hath been raised against his holiness. If he be really estranged from

SERMON

I.

from fin, and a hater of it ; why is it not prevented, why hath it admission in the world? This is to ask, in other words, why are we formed beings of such a rank ; below perfection, and with freedom of will? If God must not allow, as objects present themselves, a bad choice, (and fin is nothing else) He must not allow any choice; He must suspend the usual powers of acting, which would be a perpetual violation of the order of nature: if he must incline to good, and good only; he must at once chain up the will, and over-rule the mind: which may be government, but not moral government; and destroys the very capacity of virtue and vice. Considering therefore mankind as rational agents, the government of them plainly requires, that their Supreme Judge should leave them a discretionary choice; the only thing which can render them capable of rewards or punishments: and, if so, it is surely no reasonable plea against his holiness, that he suffers them to choose faultily, i. e. to commit fin, especially as he is not wanting

ing in endeavours to repress such choice, ^{SERMON}
by every application to the conscience, by ^{I.}
every assistance to infirmity, and by every
restraint upon the passions, compatible
with liberty.

V. But is not God declared in several passages of scripture, to be the author or abetter of sin, to prompt or promote it, to act or countenance it; by "blinding men's eyes, hardening their hearts, giving them up to their lusts, making them err from his ways, putting it in their hearts to do all manner of wickedness?" And are these ideas reconcileable with that of immaculate purity? For the solution of this matter, it should be considered, that He is our Creator, from whom all our powers are originally derived; that He is our upholder and helper, by whom the exercise of them is continued; and that we are his accountable creatures, on trial for approbation; and that in all, or most depravities, the physical act is essentially distinct from the moral turpitude of it; the one being

SERMON
I. } ing simply the exertion of a faculty, the
 } other that exertion so and so circumstanti-
 ated with respect to a rule of right, to which
 it ought to be conformable.

If therefore God be our Creator, the source of all our powers; then, whatever is done, whether good or bad, hath, mediate at least, his co-operation: and in this sense, He may be said to “make men err from his ways.” If He be our upholder and helper, who continues the exercise of our powers; then from Him are indispensably communicated supplies of ability to answer the demands of action and duty; which He will probably, as he may justly, withdraw, if repeatedly abused or slighted: and in this sense may He be said, to “give men up to their lusts.” If we are his probationary and accountable creatures, then hath He an unquestionable right to present before us objects or occasions of sin, by which dispositions may shew themselves; or submit us to assaults and temptations, by which one sin may be made the punishment of another.

ther. If at the same time sin admit, in SERMON
general, a mere physical consideration of I.
indifference; then may He with unerring
rectitude, for some purpose in his plan of
Providence, suggest, what yet may be per-
formed by the doer of it with such sinister
aim, as may render it criminal: and in one
of these senses may He be said, to "put it in
men's hearts to do wickedness." In each
of the preceding cases, however, ought his
holiness to remain unimpeached, since He
neither impels to those acts, nor is said to
approve them; but concurs only negatively,
by giving a free operation to, or by not in-
terposing against, the exertion of those fa-
culties and powers, to which he had previ-
ously given existence.

The same may be observed, in regard
to the other suggestions of "blinding the
eyes," by which is meant the infatuation
of judgment; and "hardening the heart,"
by which is implied the perversion of the
passions beyond correction: these likewise
are cases of mere permission, resolvable

not

SERMON not into any positive act of constraint or
 I. influence, but merely into his passive will;
 when He suffers men, abusing the liberty which he has granted them, and the clemency which he shews them, to go on in such courses, as will naturally darken their understandings, and stupify their consciences. And from hence the simple inference seems to be, that eventual guilt is not necessarily or naturally producible from designed mercy; and that the arraigned acts are, in reality, the acts of the delinquents themselves, not his; though, by a common form of speech imputed to him, from the circumstances of his lenity administering the occasion of them.

If, what was advanced on the attributes of the text, be not invalidated by the preceding objections, i. e. if they are still admissible articles of faith; the practical result of them is obvious:—in the first place, reverence, or admiration in sentiment carried to its full extent of expression by imitation;—in the next, terror in the commission

mission of sin, which God cannot but ^{SERMON} distinguish, if holy, with abhorrence, if ^{I.} just, with vengeance;—in the last place, steady and patient contentment. If God be holy, if God be just; whatever is, whatever adverse event occurs, must be (in some view of it) right, must have in nature adequate and fit causes. The reasons of Providence in these allotments may be latent, may be intricate; but can never be inequitable, never inexpedient: He, who is impartial, cannot be cruel; He, who is rectitude itself, cannot act injuriously.

With this soothing consolation, let us look up, through the perspective of hope, to immortality in Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, &c.

S E R M O N II.

Pf. x.—14.

*Wherefore should the wicked blaspheme God, while
he doth say in his heart,—Tush, thou God carest
not for it.*

SERMON
II.

THIS passage expresses a just resentment at the profligacy of those, who dared to justify their wickedness on the denial of a Providence: and at the same time contains an implied expostulation with God, on his permission of certain calamitous outrages committed by some merciless plunderers, (the Assyrians probably in the time of Hezekiah) and the natural result of it, a derogatory opinion, tending
to

to embolden wickedness, that he was either unconcerned in the administration, or indifferent to the issue of worldly occurrences.

SERMON
II.

Strictly and literally rendered, the passage should perhaps stand thus; "Why doth the wicked desire God, and say in his heart, thou wilt not require, or make inquisition?" I have read it to you from our earlier and less literal translation, the translation of the Septuagint; "Wherefore should the wicked blaspheme God, while he doth say in his heart, Tush, thou God carest not for it?" The difference is in expression, rather than in sense; or in sense, only as the observation is general and full, or confined to the particular case which extorted it. In consequence, with respect to a supreme moral ruler, it is much the same; whether he behold wrongs without concern, or endure them without punishment. Considering, therefore, the words in their widest view, as containing a stricture at large on the vanity of doubts

C

con-

SERMON
II.

concerning the tutelage of Providence, I will take occasion from them to enquire into the common exceptions, expressed in a light mood of infidelity, or conceived in a gloomy one of discontent, against that soothing and interesting article of religious faith; in order to shew, that they are suppositions without truth, or inferences without reason. "Wherefore should the wicked blaspheme God, while he doth say in his heart, Tush, thou God carest not for it:" on what strange grounds should the unbeliever, who rejects and braves God, or the dastardly complainant, who betrays and maligns Him, take up the unnatural sentiment, that He is either insensible to the events, or unaffected with the disorders, of his creation?

Why, the first pretence, it seems, is, that the doctrine of an all-seeing Providence implies an impossibility: that the Universe is composed of tracts too extensive, of parts too intricate, and of beings too numerous, with qualities, movements,
and

and incidents too subtle, mixed, and changeable, to be comprehended and ob- SERMON
II.

served without a labour and distraction of attention, surpassing the most stretched conceptions of power. But is not this to measure God by ourselves, and to judge of his capacity by the narrow span of our own? We cannot conceive, how He should be able to overlook and over-rule all things at once; because a diversified range of sight is indistinct, and a multiplicity of business uneasy to us, through the weakness of our limited faculties. But is not the Creator of the Universe, by the prerogative of self-existence, superiour to limitation? "He fainteth not, neither is He weary." As he exists, he operates, with the ease of complete independence: He perceives all things by one omniscient thought, and performs all things by one omnipotent act; consequently can superintend multitudes as well as individuals, and adjust circumspectively all the beings of the world with the same facility, as if his direction extended only to one. For if we ourselves can compe-

SERMON
II.

tently manage one concern, which we competently understand; why may not God, for the same reason, manage all? It will not be denied, that He understands all much better, than we understand one. Supposing therefore the world, or the motions of it, to be infinite; yet, his knowledge and his power being likewise infinite, there is the very same proportion of infinite to infinite, as one to one. In short, infinity taken into the account excludes imperfection, and perfection difficulty. Whatever is not self-repugnant, becomes on this consideration possible; whatever is possible, alike easy: and it is a contradiction to suppose, that there can be perplexity or incumbrance; where there is intelligence without medium, or boundary, and agency without dependency or defect.

There is another insinuation against the Providence of God, under the fairer form of a respectful solicitude for the support of his Majesty. And what then is the proper

per conception of Majesty? If not exerted SERMON
II.
in rule, it is only a solemn and stately
floth, or the false importance of an Eastern
idol; which sits sleeping on an awful throne,
encircled with rays of glory, its hands in its
bosom, interested without interposition, im-
plored but immoveable, revered but useless.

But, it is further urged, in the multi-
tude of beings which partake of life, there
are many so abject; in the miscellany of
incidents, which crowd the busy and shift-
ing scenes of Nature, there are many so
frivolous; that the observation of them
would be a condescension incompatible
with the divine dignity. But why should
it be conceived beneath God, to regard
what it was not beneath him to create?
The same eternal benevolence, (and it is
disparagement to suppose Him above act-
ing up to any possible extent of it) which
engaged him at first to become the parent
of the great family of beings that people
the universe, for the communication of
happiness, cannot but engage him likewise

SERMON
II.

for the preservation of it, to inspect and regulate his own offspring. By the act of bringing them into existence he seems to have given to all, the lowest, as well as the highest, a kind of right to superintendence; and it should, I conceive, exalt, not lessen our veneration of Him, to imagine him employed in so vast a superintendence, which no mind less than universal could manage, and no goodness less than perfect would undertake.

It may be proper to add further, that this objection hinges on a false support; a relative distribution of rank, a distinction of insignificance in beings or events, which is presumably man's idea, not God's. To God all beings are infinitely, that is, equally, inferior; consequently, it should seem, neither high nor low, neither dignified nor contemptible, in his estimation. And all events have some influence, immediate or remote, actual or possible, on good or evil: consequently some importance deserving of regard. Are there indeed any
abso-

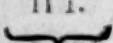
absolutely insignificant, i. e. without relation or effect? To such, impliedly neither requiring, nor admitting direction, it would be absurd to extend the concern of a wise governour: but it would be a fancy no less absurd, to discard from the concern of a good governour, as totally trifling and beneath it, whatever in any way involves or affects the happiness of any individual. And a large number of minute affairs, each separately of some moment, make up collectively a sum of great moment; which it is impossible to produce and adjust, without a watchful disposal of the several particulars, of which that sum is composed. Neglect therefore, not care, in this point, turns out the degradation and the dishonour.

The preceding reflections clear the way for considering a nearer and more direct attack on the belief of Providence from the origin of evil. Supposing it a capacity of power reconcileable in exertion with Majesty, to supervise and administer the world;

SERMON
II.

in other words, if God actually do so; why is evil admitted, why so diffusively mingled, in his system? Is not the existence of it a contradiction to all the proofs of direction? An old enquiry, of high concern, nor less perplexity!

“Why doth He permit evil?” For several reasons, perhaps, which we cannot investigate, and for some which we can. In the first place to make room for the use of matter in the structure, and for a diversity of beings in the arrangement, of creation. The imperfection of matter is an object of common sense. It cannot conceivably be formed otherwise than inert; with a resistance, which subjects it to all the contingences of impulse; and with a separability of parts, which subjects it to dissolution, with all the injuries introductory, or relative to dissolution. It cannot conceivably be made useful without motion, which must be incidentally affected by various impediments. It cannot conceivably be animated without sensations, which must be

be sometimes painful or disagreeable ; and SERMON
III. appetites, which must be sometimes by  misapplication or interference liable to disappointment. It cannot conceivably be united to a thinking principle without errors, perplexities, and all the possible perturbations of judgment or volition. And, even if these difficulties were surmounted ; of pure unmixed good, or what we deem so, universally prevalent, what must be the result ? What, but a single order of beings ; of one character, or without inequality : by which creation would be narrowed in extent, and the benignity of its author in manifestation. If then existence be in any respect a blessing, and life on the conditions, with which it is observably qualified, preferable to the absence of it : (which who will controvert ?) if material substance be admissible, and the ills consequently supervening, either not avoidable, or not to be avoided without greater inconveniences : (which who can disprove ?) if multiplicity and variety of species display more largely, by any accession of benefit, the attributes

SERMON
II.
tributes of a Creator, (which reflection readily apprehends:) then the rule of Providence is still compatible with the introduction of evil. And to ask, why He permits it, is to ask, in plain language, why He has framed such a system as the earth, and such a being as man: or still more rashly, perhaps, why he admits any system less than perfect, or any being less than all-sufficient and infinite: that is, in short, any other being than himself.

But let us inspect this matter yet more minutely. The evil, of which discontent complains, is either moral, or physical. The former seems to be the necessary result of abused liberty. Liberty, the distinction which enlarges and varies the procedure of intellect, the excellence by which we rise superiour to passive mechanism with a portion of divine sufficiency, the medium by which alone we become, through the selection of indifferent objects, through the conscious resolution of patience, through the preventions of forecast, through

through the obedience of morality, capable of happiness, is certainly a gift worth enjoying. From the abuse of this gift, or a depraved choice, from not endeavouring, the most we can, to do what we ought, arises in general guilt, or moral evil, with its concomitant infelicity; which, therefore, depending on ourselves, on the neglect or perversion of our own powers, is not imputable to Providence, with any argument of reflection on the goodness or power of God; nor is the permission of it inconsistent with counsel or care: while it cannot be precluded, without such privation or continual restraint of the elective faculty, as would destroy not only all vice, but all virtue too; all action or all self-approbation, every idea of reward or desert; in short, all the privileges and all the pleasures of rationality; and consequently without prepollent mischief, which would reflect discredit on wisdom; and a diminished sum of happiness, which would be a diminished exercise of goodness.

It

SERMON
II.

It may be further added, that the existence of moral evil may have its necessity, and hath certainly its use: it may be necessary, to preserve vigilance in the restraints of inclination, and the regards of futurity, by exhibiting with sensible conviction its own consequences, by making its effects and tendencies seen, felt, and acknowledged: and virtue, from the permission of it, if encountering more temptations, which the just discipline of a probationary state may reconcile, hath, at the same time, more warnings and encouragements; as example sways more forcibly than lessons, and sight or feeling than conjectural opinion or abstracted contemplation.

With respect to physical evil, or suffering in external circumstances, it is in like manner a symptom or character of an active nature. It is certain, that a condition, in which there were no apparent evils to be corrected, or, what is equivalent, no accession of good to be gained, would be a condition of inaction; adverse

to the nature of man, who hath various powers, and excitements to exert them. In SERMON
II.

other words, a being, who had no want, (and if there were no perceivable evil, he would have plainly no want) could have no principle of activity. It is equally certain, that without this evil much good would be lost in the trial of integrity for a superiour state, and even much physical good, the one dependently inferring the other. If, for instance, there were no pains, there would be in many instances no notices of danger, nor consequently provisions for preservation; if there were no hunger or thirst, there would be no satisfaction in allaying either; if there were no such thing as indigence, there could be no affluence, or no great benefit by it: the remark might be enlarged to a wide comprehension, for if life had no discomforts, it could boast few satisfactions. And it is observable, that some incidents are seemingly evil, which would prove otherwise, could we penetrate through the whole contexture of things; and acquaint ourselves with all their relations, in-

SERMON
II.

influences, and tendencies: and that, lastly, if there be evils, of which men know not the true origin; yet would they seriously reflect on the many traits of reason, wisdom, and benevolence, every where distinguishable in cases, which they do or may understand; they could scarce doubt of the same prevalence in those which they do not.

In our disquisitions then on worldly events, on worldly evil particularly, considered as a concern beyond the regulation, beneath the attention, or without the permission, of the Deity, may we not now with confidence repeat after the Psalmist; “Wherefore should the wicked blaspheme God, while he doth say in his heart, Tush, thou God carest not for it.” Or, if yet unsatisfied, if yet perplexed with misgivings, in some portentous and deplorable instances concerning the origin or propriety of it, let us call in a reflection on the immense distance between man and the Almighty: recollecting, that He, whose acts we examine, is “the high and lofty One that inhabiteth Eternity;” that created mind is at best a measure

measure too scanty to fathom the profound SERMON
II. of his secrets; that He may operate from motives which we cannot know, for purposes which we cannot develop, with a fitness which may be felt by individuals as hardship, and with a regularity which may yet seem, in parts and parcels of procedure, without the connecting thread of causes and consequences, inexplicable confusion: and that, therefore, considering the short reach of a finite understanding, and the impeded sight of an incorporated one, it is our becoming part rather to acquiesce with humble veneration, than to cavil and complain with captious distrust; in short, to rest satisfied, that whatever may be the apparent intricacy of things, "the Judge of all the earth cannot but do right;" and that he, who chastises wrong, can never commit wrong himself.

These dutiful sentiments God grant that we may cherish in our hearts, and express in a suitable and correspondent practice, through Jesus Christ our Lord, &c.

S E R-

S E R M O N III.

Pf. cxxi.—5.

The Lord is thy Keeper.

SERMON
III

WE have here from the mouth of a chosen Minister of God (for I conceive the Priest, on seeing, perhaps, the known signal of favour, to utter this sentence) an emphatic declaration of a providential attention to the imploring Jew and his compatriots. I mean not, however, to consider the text in this circumscribed view, as referring to them only, but in a much wider circuit, as pointing out the doctrine of God's over-ruling Providence at large to us, his offspring, likewise. "The Lord
is

“ is our Keeper :” nor ours merely, but <sup>SERMON
III.</sup> the preserver, the guard, the director of his whole creation, without partiality or remission: an interesting and cheering truth! In my last discourse I endeavoured to obviate the objections; that have been urged against it: let us now pursue the subject, and enquire from what reasonings on his nature and ours, it is satisfactorily deducible.

I. By Providence is understood that divine care, which preserves the being, and conducts to proper ends the movements of the world; that care, under which no creature exists without cognizance, no power acts without concurrence, no incident happens without appointment or permission. That this comprehensive care belongs to God, that He presides over, inspects, provides for, co-operates with all things, hath an influence in all causes, and a guidance in all events, may be proved, I think, in the first place, from what He hath done as Creator: his actions

D

indi-

SERMON
III.

indicating design, and his designs characteristically answering his attributes. What then is implied in creation? Not surely a mere essay of power, or specimen of wisdom, (this supposition reduceth the work itself, if not to a mere nugatory act, to a project of curiosity or fame, and the motive of it to the human weakness of vain-glory) but that which it is more reasonable to connect in expectation with goodness, an exercise of benevolence, some intended production of happiness, which will argue as forcibly for the guardianship, as for the gift of existence. Or, benevolence apart, supposing a display of skill to be the sole object of forecast, yet must not even this narrow aim be frustrated without an occasional application of the plastic hand? In a scene various as the universe, constructed of systems extensive and complex, occupied by creatures, some irrational, others free, both capable of perversion; and by bodies mixt and alterable, traversing in every possible direction, composed at the same time of parts flux and dissoluble, out of
passive

SERMON
III.

except that of its Maker? What, but infinite intelligence can penetrate universally, and discern intimately systems with all their dependencies, species with all their varieties, individuals with all their connections, faculties in all degrees, qualities in all associations, modes of operation in all consequences? And without this discernment what intelligence can sustain and manage each, assign and maintain to each its fit place, function, and limitation; suspend or guide laws of influence, hinder principle from interfering with principle, intention with intention, movement with movement; communicate with spirits, suggest turns and trains of thought, control on calls of expediency, or let loose the passions; urge or moderate exertion, correct error, and dispose evil to the production of good? If then the world be governed, (which it cannot conceivably be in any proper sense, i. e. to any purpose of certain regularity, without these interposing attentions) where is the command of sufficiency for the exercise of them, except in its Maker?

If governed! have I said? And SERMON
III. must there not be imbecillity or negligence, if it be not governed; a restraint upon the Maker, that He cannot, or a defect in him, that He will not, survey and adjust it? Allow the first of these suppositions; where is his omnipotence, his omniscience, his omnipresence? Allow the latter; where is his wisdom, his justice, his mercy? Allow either; where is the perfection essentially implied in the notion of his being? Where, in particular, that tenderness in the accommodation of a dependent off-spring, or that delight in beholding the effects of it, which, in parental connections, pervades and actuates nature generally, good nature eminently, according to the operation of his own law?

Considering his attributes, indeed, we must conclude, that He is not only qualified, but necessitated in some measure to take upon himself the administration of the universe. It is capable of strict proof,

SERMON
III.



that absolute intelligence, the inseparable property of an uncaused being, includes absolute rectitude: of which benevolence is a necessary branch; from which Providence is a necessary result. He who explores all nature, and understands all truth, He who perceives in every case what is best, and of every determination all the minute and final tendencies, cannot err in conduct, cannot injure, cannot inflict or permit real hardship, cannot consequently abandon his creatures; i. e. cannot but superintend, or, in other words, cannot but attend to them with an active Providence.

But waving this research, which might seem less solid, than elaborate, and attended with less utility, than refinement, let us take the idea of God, as familiarized to us by general conception; which is that of a spiritual sovereign, or supreme, wise, powerful, good: his goodness comprehending justice, veracity, benignity; his benignity comprehending bounty and mercy. What then is sovereignty or supremacy without rule?

Is

Is there a sovereign on earth, who would SERMON
III.
not think his greatness contemptible, if he remained all his life long in a state of abstraction and inactivity, a simple beholder of disturbances, by which he might be injured; or of occurrences, in which he might be interested, without interposition?

But this sovereign is an infinite spirit. Without thought then, what is spirituality? Without infinite thought, which implies infinite business for thought, what is the prerogative of spiritual infinity? Wisdom, power, goodness, give the same result. Without design or direction, what is wisdom? Locked up from exertion, if every thing be done without interference, what is power? Without a distribution of rewards and punishments, what is justice? Without threats or promises, offers or declarations to fulfil, what is veracity? Without gifts, or services, what is bounty? In leaving claimants upon care, the prey of calamity, or the sport of accident, where is benignity? In not distinguishing sufferers by relief, and criminals by patience or pardon, where

is

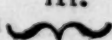
SERMON
III.

is mercy? If these attributes be not mere names, which in intellectual and rational nature they cannot be; they have a reference to objects, their essence consists in action, their perfection in exercise: and to suppose, therefore, in an extensive assemblage of beings, where there are endless opportunities, and numberless exigents for design, communication, and solicitude, for regulation, retribution, and grace, no notice, no administration, no intervention, is to suppose a miracle of inconsistency; is indeed to reduce the Creator, below his creatures, into a figure of pageantry, that has eyes and sees not, hands and acts not; a transformation as abject as absurd, exhibiting a true picture, not of dignity or excellence, but of insensibility or sloth.

The argument from creation is not yet exhausted. God hath implanted, we find, in most creatures a fond instinctive care of their offspring: and can we conceive that, when every creature is tender of its young,
every

every good-natured parent incessantly studious for the sustenance and accommodation of those, who have descended from him; there should be no affection in God prompting him to provide for that large family of the universe, which depend upon him for their daily support? Can we suppose, that the Author of Nature should be in opposition to his own general law, without loving-kindness for that to which Himself gave being, without an interest in it, and without regard? Rather let us conclude that the Maker of the world is its keeper.

SERMON
III.



II. But to bring this truth yet more home to ourselves, let us now, for the further evidence of it, turn to man. The first idea of Him is helplessness: he has, at his birth, more wants than most other creatures, and more debility. In this state, what would become of him, were it not for the yearnings of parental instinct: the existence of which is an incident, and the uniform operation of which, amidst tempers and circum-

SERMON
III.

circumstances so various, is a still more wonderful incident; not to be accounted for, the one without the appointment, the other without the guidance, of a contriving and observing providence.

Under the care of this instinct, his capacities open, and his abilities strengthen, by successive improvements; and though against this gradual evolution of his faculties, exception hath raised an insinuation of impropriety; it is not less weak, than irreverent. For were he to come into the world, of strength mature, and in full vigour; of what use would this maturity of bulk or strength be, unexerted and unapplied; i. e. without competent skill to exert and apply it? Might it not prove prejudicial? Having still an inert state, a noviciate of ignorance, arising from a want of ideas, to pass through, till he had learned the play of his organs, and the direction of his pursuits; without speech, without significant gesture, without the tenderness of implanted instinct to nurse him, without the watchfulness of interested

interested prudence to govern him, with the loss of parental sensibility, including at the same time, all those pleasing, useful, lasting attachments often growing upon it; and with the reversal of a law generally prevalent through the other orders of the animate creation; what would he obtain? Enlarged wants less readily ascertained, less easily supplied; keener sensations, the rise, the tendency, the relief of them unknown; a multiplied probability of injury, not only received, but returned, from the unguarded or undistinguished action or passion of surrounding objects; in short, a greater destitution, with more occasions for assistance; and more chances of suffering and perishing, without an increase of advantages in compensation. Let us acknowledge therefore the regard of providence, in this questioned arrangement.

Let us acknowledge it likewise, on the farther advance of man in nonage, through the whole period of inexperience; in which temerity is apt to precipitate, and ductility
to

SERMON
III.

to betray him, into so many irregularities or levities, of which he sees not, or heeds not, the consequences; that without the particular influence of some external succour, and some occasional controul, (however invisible the workings of it) his safety or his welfare would be for almost any given space, a contingency scarce conceivable.

In his adult state, there is the same necessity, and therefore from divine goodness the same strong conclusion, for the attention of providence. Man is, from various causes, susceptible, in various degrees, of pleasure and pain: can it be supposed, that there is no provision, no regimen, for the adjustment of these. By the incitements of the one, he performs many a necessary function, and engages in many an important pursuit; by the impressions of the other he presages, and evades many a calamity. Can it be supposed that all this is exclusive of regulation?

He

He appears intrusted with talents, which SERMON
III. he may improve or suppress; he is furnished  with energies and opportunities of exerting them, which he may turn to utility, or pervert to mischief: he is endued with propensities of temper, largely diversified; which lay in mutual dependance the grand foundation of social union. Can it be supposed, that these are all casual, or left at large to every event of every hazard, without prevention or restriction? The right exercise of these is besides a duty: and from some of them, understanding, reason, the perception of moral good and evil, which we call conscience, with the faculty of electing either, and deliberating on both, which we call free-will, peculiar gifts in his lot, arises a whole system of duties, of the utmost moment: by performing or flighting which, he becomes deserving or criminal, rewardable or punishable. Can it be supposed, that in the conduct of these principles, act as he may, whether he apply them to answer their known purpose, whether he discharge the obligations derived from them, or otherwise, he shall not be subject

SERMON
III.

subject or summoned to cognizance? But
if cognizable, how possibly so without a
regular inspection of providence?

His dangers are not less observable, than his principles or talents. He is surrounded with creatures, many his superiours in strength, few not capable of injuring him; which have their armature for annoyance, and their disposition for prey: yet, which not only leave him unmolested, but associate with him in amity. Some, even in his family, are tempered to his command, and work for his benefit. Exclusive of a providence, exclusive of a particular designation maintained and enforced by a continued superintendence, can you account for this circumstance; i. e. not for their forbearance towards him, not for their harmlessness only, but their obedience and subjugation? Dangers however he incurs, and from imminent dangers he is rescued: frequent enough these to convince him, if he reflect, that he must be under the shield of a heavenly guard.

Common

Common experience may be trusted for SERMON
III. the admission of this remark; there being  few, if any, who will not on a just review of their lives, perceive them to be a round of providential escapes, of critical conjectures, and unexpected deliverances.

The preceding reflections regard man, solely or principally as an individual. But he is not a detached and insulated being: his faculties, his desires, his fears, all impel him to union. Let us see then, whether the custody of Providence be not equally requisite, and the supposition of it equally irresistible in his collective and social capacity. In this view considered, among numbers in combination, with necessities multiplied, interests jarring, inequalities remarked, and passions stimulating; what contention, what injustice, what confusion, must overspread the earth, what a sad scene of misery must every district of it be, without an over-ruling power to bar in some sort the execution, or divert in some degree the intended effect, of hostile and wicked designs? That the bands of society are not severed,
that

SERMON
III.

that the world is not a theatre of triumphant mischief, and fraud and violence the chief and most distinguished actors in it; that it is, with all its discomforts, yet administered, on the whole, with such regularity as to be a tolerable habitation; may be presumed owing to the guardianship of that divine wisdom, which steps in with frequent and timely resistance to stay the career of ferocity, and save innocence from the stroke, or the plot, of oppression.

Another view of man remains, enforcing on conviction as true, or on approbation at least as highly reasonable and highly momentous, the belief of a Providence;—his religious capacity. From the universality of religion in some prevalent worship among all the divisions of his species, I am not afraid to affirm, that it is a principle of his nature. By almost every reflection on every phænomenon, the rude, as well as the cultured of his species, are inclined to the conception of invisible power, and the oblation of propitiatory worship. An inclination thus universal must be natural.

It

It is, if I may so speak, his vertical direction, which he cannot be restrained from pursuing, without drooping under depressions, or shooting into irregularities; that lead, it may be, to deride or lament the perversion, yet, at the same time, to acknowledge the inherence of the principle. But to what end this congenial principle: or what reasonable meaning in the assignment or encouragement of it, abstracted from the idea of providential agency? It is evident, that most of the acts of devotional homage respect the Deity, not merely as an universal cause; but as our particular patron, protector, and preserver. If therefore not persuaded, that he attends with an immediate care to all his creatures in the government of all events, on what ground, or with what propriety, can we take up the most essential performances of religious duty? Of what avail is it, for instance, on any emergent occasion, to fear, to trust in, to praise, to pray to, him; if He confine himself to a superior region, and shut us out from his regard?

E

Such

SERMON
III.
}

SERMON
III.

Such is the natural consequence, which reason urges against the denial of a providence, as a subversion, in effect, of all religion; which is a subversion, in the end, of all social happiness: since there can be, without religion, neither sincerity nor security; conscience resolving itself into convenience, and virtue into interest.

Upon the whole, to whatever object turning, whether to God, or to man; on whatever apprehension reasoning, whether of truth or expediency; we extract at length the same heart-felt conclusion, that “the Lord is our keeper.”

Under the impression of this conclusion, be it our serious endeavour, to revere him worthily, and serve him acceptably: with an assurance, that whether we revere or neglect him, we shall not be overlooked by him; with an assurance also, that, if we obey him, we shall please him; and that, if we please him, by doing what he hath commanded, we shall attain consequently

S E R M O N.

51

quently to what he hath promised: which ^{SERMON}
is a peace beyond comparison here, and a ^{III.}
happinefs beyond conception in a life with-
out termination hereafter.

S E R M O N IV.

Ecclef. ix.—3.

*This is an evil among all things that are done
under the Sun, that there is one event unto
All.*

SERMON
IV

OF the usual pretences against an ordering and presiding providence, the most pressing one perhaps is the subject of regret, here suggested by the preacher, as from the mouth of a complainant: viz. the contingent and promiscuous distribution of earthly allotments. Yet it grounds on a false assumption, or at least on an uncertainty beyond the comprehension of our judgment.

In addition to the arguments advanced in my preceding discourses, tending to obviate

viate the pretences urged against the doctrine of a super-intending Providence, and to establish the truth of it; let us in the sequel examine the complaint of the text, and the inferences that have been drawn from it, in disparagement of so important a tenet.

SERMON
IV.

To constitute unity of event, there must be unity of effect; or, in the present case, a precisely equal product of pleasure or pain. But pleasure and pain, or identity of either from any given cause, or in any apparent concurrence of circumstances, who can determine? We know, indeed, that they are variable, that they are modified by perception, which is relative and personal; that they depend on constitution, affections, tastes, habits, reflection; and that they never come entire without complications and mixtures, which turn their edge, or alter their impression. We know too, that the exterior of conditions, the common criterion in the estimate of them, is too fallacious to be trusted: scripture, reason,

SERMON
IV.

and experience unitedly teaching, that happiness or misery is distinct from externals; that there may be abundance without ease, and ease without abundance; that the powers of enjoyment have often their canker, which renders them useless; and sufferings their balm, which renders them harmless.

Exclusive however of these presumptive diversities and probable allays in the production of pleasure and pain, supposing them to be always uncompounded and uniform, yet who can decide, whether either, or whether any result from either, be good or ill; that is, consequentially and ultimately advantageous, or detrimental? Each, we know, frequently treads on the heels of each, with imperceptible connection: from imaginary successes springs many a calamity, from what we querulously deem adverse occurrences the gratification of many a favourite wish. By a sort of redemption and commutation, not uncommonly observable, circumstances of particularity intercept, or alleviate misery:
and,

and, in general, according to the moral ^{SERMON}
influence of conditions, which varies with ^{IV.} 
varying dispositions, is formed their true
estimation. The same prosperity, for in-
stance, by which the virtuous become grate-
ful, circumspect, liberal, reverent to God,
and useful to man, tends to render the
wicked vain, dissipated, licentious, petu-
lant and pitiless: the same affliction, which
brings the former to their Maker with ac-
knowledgments of his dominion, which
works in them humble resignation; which
is a monitor to them of futurity, which
reminds them to scan their whole conduct
with care, in order to reform it with ex-
actness, which calls forth with renewed
strength all their discreet resolutions, pro-
duces in the latter gloomy discontents, ma-
licious envyings, and wayward complaints,
a further alienation from God in thought,
and provocation of him in act, by dispa-
ragements of his justice, and endeavours
by criminal expedients to break away from
submission to his government.

SERMON
IV.

In short, as improved or abused, as impressing minds, as regulating manners, as affecting contentment, as involving and determining the great concerns of futurity, the allotments of our earthly destiny assume plainly a different aspect, with a different ratio of good or ill. And if then there may be resemblance of circumstances without coincidence of consequences, if what is visible of conditions or incidents be a precarious index of pleasure or pain, and pleasure or pain be still more indeterminate of benefit or disadvantage; is it not falsely or very questionably suggested against Providence, as an evil, or indeed as a fact, except in a very lax sense, "that there is one event unto all?" By recurring to ignorance in the preceding observation, by resolving the principle of the objection, to which it replies, into a possible deception of incompetent judgment, I may be thought perhaps to evade, rather than encounter the difficulty. I will therefore next reply to it in a stricter and more direct discussion.

Per-

Permit me to suppose (no unreasonable SERMON
IV. postulate) that humanity is a system, for  some wise reason of supreme design, and necessary in the constitution of nature; what does the objection demand? An abolition of general laws in this system. For there must be, if general laws, promiscuous events. But from the proposed innovation, what mischiefs would follow? In the first place, the destruction of order, with which vanishes at once every idea of economy and beauty in creation; its parts no longer simple and congruous, its movements no longer regular, its beings no longer determinate in agency, or specific in character: in the next place, an utter exclusion of certainty, with which vanish all the acquisitions of science, all the principles of art, all the comforts of life. Of causes and effects we know little except their connexion: and while this connexion continues stable, whilst objects exhibit in general, with observable constancy on similar trials, similar appearances; the mariner pursues his course, the
hus-

SERMON
IV.

husbandman commits his grain to the ground, the physician prescribes his drug, or the artist constructs his machine, anticipating respectively with happy confidence the accomplishment of his purpose from the same revolutions of the heavenly bodies, the same vicissitudes of seasons, the same action of mechanical and physical powers. But take away from the objects of the universe this unity of character, let them appear or act with fickle or lawless mutability; agriculture, medicine, pilotry, mechanism, all calculation, the whole process of induction, the whole force of analogy, the whole directory of experience, is precluded and cancelled: the pursuit of knowledge becomes vain toil, the application of it desperate diffidence; observation is without use, reflection without decision, provision for self-preservation without security, and solicitude without end or remedy.

If such be the conceivable consequences of the projected alteration in the
na-

natural world; its inconveniences would not be less in the moral. Substitute in the regimen of the moral world particular laws for general, that is, success and disappointment, recompence and punishment, adjusted to actions and agents, with accurate and immediate discrimination; what would obviously result? In the first period of life, before the formation of moral character, under the common lot of original equality, either an utter suspension of every influencing principle; or, distinctions without diversity, preferences without recommendations, and sufferings without demerit: in subsequent periods, a bar to the formation of moral character, that would operate universally. For under the dominion of justice, so awfully present, with arm perceivably extended for instant retribution, who would dare to reject her allurements, or brave her infliction? Would not the consequence be, one determined course of conduct? Would not duty be so irresistibly and convertibly connected with gain, as to leave no room
for

SERMON

IV,

SERMON
IV.

for the indulgence of inclination, the growth of desert, and the display of disposition; for the proof of sincerity by resolution, of benevolence by disinterestedness, of faith by contentment; in short, for many exercises of virtue, particularly exalting and perfecting man, particularly venerating and pleasing God?

It is now perhaps perceived, that general laws, from which arise indiscriminate events, in the administration of the world, carry with them a large and satisfactory consideration of benefit; and that therefore the objection, which demands the reversal of them, demands an impropriety. Let us next see (still retaining the supposition, for the truth of which we have the pledge of infinite Wisdom, that there ought to be in the plan of nature such a being as man) whether it does not demand likewise an impossibility.

1. Man may be viewed individually or aggregately. As an individual, he may be considered as a creature: consequently sub-
ject

ject to the government of his Creator, consequently accountable; endowed at the same time with powers and desires, which imply a destination for futurity, and consequently a probationer for the allotments of it. In this light then, without an occasional separation, in his preparatory state, between virtue and happiness, vice and misery, how is he to be disciplined and tried? Without imperfection, and the effects of imperfections to obviate, without difficulties to combat, crosses to bear, and temptations to resist, how are his capacities to be opened, his principles explored, his exertions and improvements ascertained? How is he to manifest the qualities; that lay the foundation of, and form those habits, which fit him for the reception of an immortal destiny?

SERMON
IV.

Individually likewise, on trial for a future destination, he is, and must be, a free agent; required to act with rectitude and with reason, directed by rules, and solicited by motives, but unconstrained

SERMON
IV.

ed in his choice, and unobstructed in his endeavours. Here then lies a grand source, as of depravity in human actions, so of uncertainty in human occurrences. Under this dispensation of moral freedom, it is not possible to conceive, but that there must be irregular and traversing efforts, mixt means of pursuit, and mixt results of attainment, with every consequence of every passion or appetite excessively or misappliedly indulged; that licentiousness will sometimes rival innocence, dissimulation supplant merit, and fraud circumvent honesty, in the acquisition of pleasure, honour, or profit; in other words, that the bad will be found intermingled and interfering with the good, in the events of worldly gratification.

But 2dly, the survey of man, merely as an individual, is curtailed, is unnatural. Let us rather consider him, in his social capacity; and the impossibility that his fate should be otherwise than indiscriminate, will more evidently appear.

Here

Here he first offers, as a member of a ^{SERMON}
family; in a connexion of descent, which ^{III.}
fashions and fixes, independent on personal
character, his constitution, estimation, and
fortune. The parents, from whom he is
descended, are healthy or distempered,
virtuous or dissolute, provident or negli-
gent, affluent or necessitous. Is it possible,
without a constant and universal prodigy
of confusion, to stop the course of these
influences; to prevent innocence from
suffering, by the comprehension of an un-
fortunate relation, transferred malady or
inconvenience, the affliction or humiliation
of penury, the resumption of unjustly ac-
quired property, the taint of luxury, the
ach of indiscretion, the languor of infirmi-
ty, or the blot of infamy?

The transmissive casualties of domestic
connexion operate with further exten-
sion, in equalizing events. In the com-
bination of a family the heart is variously
touched, and powerfully moved by attach-
ments. It shoots out, if I may so speak,
numerous

SERMON
IV.

numerous filements, which fasten, with growing force, from familiarity to surrounding objects; and whatever affects these, communicates immediately with sensible vibration to the center. In other words, a great portion of human pleasures or pains is derivative, and acts by participation. What then would be the case, were respective differences, and judicial distinctions to mark events? The wicked could not conceivably be blended with the good in intimate union, without deriving from their prosperity some joy, some service, or some relief; the good could not, if possessing affection or compassion, be perpetual witnesses to the visitations and exemplary chastisements of sinners under their own roof, or in their own lineage, without grief, perhaps without injury too by the loss of their utility. It would be impossible, in short, to punish all the wicked, with absolute harmlessness to all the good; or to reward all the good without communicating in some degree to some of the wicked a share of their felicity: but, if so; the scheme of completely

pletely separating lots, without a complete separation of persons, defeats itself: and it remains to infer, that from the influence both of propagation in descent, and of conjunction by kindred, one event unto all is often inevitable.

SERMON
IV.

3. The social sphere of man next widens from the circumference of family to that of neighbourhood. Here he is linked and leagued in several dependencies of situation, employment, and interest. He breathes a common air with his associates; he eats of similar food, he pursues joint objects with them in callings, travels, enterprizes: shall then that, which is noxious to some, prove at the same time salutary to others? Shall winds be at once favourable, and adverse, to the same voyagers? Shall famine and plenty, defeat and conquest, danger and safety be found attendant on the same parties at the same instant?—Absurd!—Without an incessant accumulation of interfering miracles, without a perpetual and inconceivable inversion

SERMON
IV.

of natural causes and effects, impossible!—

It follows therefore, that in the occurrences of our present relative and complex state, we cannot be divided and sorted by any precise canon of worth, but must partake a general fate of advantage or detriment, enjoyment or distress.

IV. But let us turn to the last, the highest, view of man, in his civil capacity, as connected with government. Here again, his discrimination still becomes impossible. For he is, in the first place, subject to the common fate of his society, must encounter its dangers, and share its calamities: and, in the next place, subject to its laws. These, however administered, intentionally place him on a ground of equality; liable to the same treatments, and contingences of treatment, with his fellow citizens: their office, as their use, is, to direct universally, to redress impartially, to punish irrespectively. A grand object of their operation is property; of which they fix the title, and controul, as well as guard, the devolution: inducing in each
con-

concern an important effect for present consideration. The title of property does not, cannot reside, under the adjustment of human laws, in virtue or merit; but in inheritance, gift, purchase, or other honest mode of acquiring it: hence a plain consequence; that the indiscreet and the profligate may obtain without exception that affluence; which they squander or misemploy; that the alienation of it may at the same time intercept from the innocent many enjoyments, which they lose with regret; and oppress them with many conflicts, which they do not deserve to suffer.

Another similar consequence sometimes occurs from legal restraint on the devolution of property; by which a young expectant is suddenly perhaps, in his advances to dignity and fortune, which he has birth to claim, and accomplishments to illustrate, stopped, and depressed to beggary, not for his own crime, but for that of his parent: a proceeding, which

SERMON
IV

compassion condemns as vindictive severity, but which political prudence defends, as expedient for terrour, for effectual punishment, and for general safety. Whether expedient however, or not, it hath indisputably a considerable influence, (an influence without the dissolution of civil society unavoidable) in determining promiscuously "One event unto All."

The assimilation of mankind in the mingled disposal of present events, on which Scepticism hath fastened an exception, hath now been amply examined: and we seem warranted, on the whole, to conclude that the supposed ill effect of it is exaggerated; the alteration of it, on every idea of man, separate and collective, not feasible, or not expedient.

The practical result of these reflections is, with strict circumspection in conducting ourselves, a tender reserve in judging of others. As all kinds of practice find shelter under authority, and men of
all

all descriptions an undistinguished com- SERMON
IV.
plication in all occurrences; we are not to
make either example our rule of action,
or fortune good or bad our test of character.

Another obvious consequence is, submissi-
on to God. If puzzled with his procedure,
if not able to discover the clew of his counsels,
let us look forward with reverential acqui-
escence to the final judgment; which will
wind up the administration of this subluna-
ry system with unveiled justice and visible
perfection; with a solution of every moral
problem, a distinction of every merit and
demerit, a correction of every inequality,
and an illustrative vindication of every ap-
pointment. It will then clearly appear,
that God hath dealt graciously with us his
creatures; that time, however we may
stretch its extent, when we survey it as
the measure of life, or compute the mo-
tion of it under the pressure of sorrow, is
yet but a section of incommensurable mi-
nuteness in the Vast of Eternity: that con-
sequently the pleasures, which raise the

SERMON
IV.

daily hankerings of envy, and the pains, which are the daily themes of complaint, even if greater than our common false reckoning supposes them, are still too transcient to be of real moment; that they are besides good or evil, merely as they are used; but, whether good or evil, balanced ultimately by an unerring hand, and to be remembered no more, when that balance takes place in the doom of futurity.

May this doom be our thought, our direction, our felicity, through Jesus Christ, &c.

SER-

S E R M O N V.

John x.—37, 38.

If I do not the Works of my Father, believe me not: — But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the Works.

OUR Saviour here, with firm fearlessness, the ordinary pledge of conscientious veracity, appeals to his miraculous works for the illustration of his character; and seems to rest on the distinction of them the whole validity of his pretensions, or, in short, the whole credibility of his heavenly mission. They must therefore have been marked with some peculiarity, discernible in his time by observers, and deducible after his time by examiners; which intitles them to this high consideration. And so they undoubtedly were: they demonstrated themselves to sense by clear

S E R M O N
V.
~~~~~

F 4                      effects;



SERMON  
V.

effects; they were not artificial tricks, which might delude a weak imagination; not merely strange events, which might be admired as rare or mysterious: but evident performances, demonstrating themselves by plain and obvious results, to the perception of beholders; consequently real and certain.

And they were superior to all natural human power, or to the known powers of the visible agent, in issue or in circumstance; that is, they produced results, not only extraordinary, but either such as no human or visible power could in any way produce, of which kind is a revival of the dead; or such as exceeded in the manner of production the limits of all human power, of which kind is the instantaneous cure of diseases, by a touch or verbal command: they were exercises of sovereignty over nature, suspending or altering the customary operation of physical laws, that is, in reality, the established order of Providence: they were not one or two facts, but several of  
several

several kinds; not suspicious by obscurity SERMON  
V. or privacy, but public to multitudes, both of friends and enemies; subject therefore to strict notice by men of all capacities, and all parties.

They were of some permanency too, either in themselves by frequent repetition on proper occasions, or in consequence by durable efficacy, by a change or reference, comprehending some extent of time: a change, for instance, in restorations from death, distemper, or defect, which lay open to continued enquiry; or a reference to futurity in predictions, which remained as so many touchstones for the trial of their credit. And they were, lastly, neither wicked and mischievous, nor frivolous or fantastical; but acts of power directed by benevolence, instances of goodness to the bodies or souls of those to whom they referred, and not wrought but for great and weighty reasons; to remove affliction, to obviate danger, or propagate a faith, which led by just morals to true happiness.

With

SERMON

V.

With these luminous characteristics of Divinity in his miracles, for they could not be performed without an omnipotent coadjutor, our Saviour might well call attention to them, as the works of his Father; as vouching his descent, and confirming his revelation.

The question is, how far this emphatic call concerns us; or, by what evidence we are now warranted to believe the reality of those miracles. Their evidence then is plainly the credibility of the records reporting them; of which accordingly, as authenticated or invalidated, they share their respective fate in reception, or rejection.

Now the credibility of the records reporting them depends on the following circumstances: on exact compilation by different penmen in different places, yet all well acquainted with every object, and every incident of their narrative, as they were either hearers and spectators themselves

felves of every thing which they attest, or SERMON  
V.  
constant companions of those who were, from whose attestation come with equal credit whatever facts they report; and as they could not possibly be induced by any worldly interest to deliver, what they did, without a perfect persuasion of its truth: so far otherwise, that they exposed life to known hazard in the publication, and laid it down with unabating zeal in the defence of their voluntary assertions.

Thus compiled, these writings were soon dispersed into a great number of hands, translated very early into many languages, kept with a religious care in many far distant places, and constantly read in public for universal instruction; and hence by consequence not easily capable of being falsified. And though the constant use of these writings occasioned them to be much more frequently transcribed than any other books, by which means there must of necessity, without a miracle, be many literal and verbal mistakes, or variations  
in



SERMON  
V.

in the manner of writing; yet this great number of copies, which may be compared, and by comparison rectified from one another, hath been a great security to all their essential contents. Still farther;—that these books were written at the time pretended, and by the persons to whom they are ascribed, we have a more general and uniform assurance, in every age since their appearance, than can be produced for any other writings of similar antiquity: without a negative by the first literary opponents of Christianity; who must have had better means of information than succeeding enquirers, and who would have been willing enough to question their genuineness, had there been any colour for the objection. Is not here then an aggregate of evidence, sufficiently clear in origin, sufficiently secure in transmission, to place the appeal of the text, or the miracles of Christ, to which it refers, above discredit?

It has, however, been surmised otherwise. It is said, that antiquity itself diminishes

minishes the certainty of them; that, being SERMON  
V. facts dependent on testimony, they must  continually become less and less credible, from the very nature of testimony, and the fate necessarily attending the conveyance of it; since experience assures us, that facts of every kind, and of what moment or importance soever, which pass successively through several hands, are at each step so much altered, misrepresented, and disguised, from a variety of causes; that it becomes next to impossible, at any distance of time to discover the genuine features of truth, or to know, with certainty, the original state of the case: an observation this, which is thought applicable to all written history, sacred as well as profane; the transmission of it to remoter times being in like manner attended with numberless depravations, which at every remove both violate its purity, and impair its credit; the decrease of which is therefore regular, and proportionate to the length of time elapsed, and even determinable by exact calculation.

If

SERMON  
V.

If this position be just, an obvious consequence results: that it apparently precludes the Almighty, from delivering any standing Revelation for the perpetual instruction of mankind. For, "whether the system come from God, or whether it be of Man," it must according to this notion in a course of ages "alike come to nought:" unless indeed the mouldering fabric should be, from time to time continually repaired, and miraculously supported by fresh interpositions of divine power: and this must cause an equal difficulty to recur; as miracles so frequently repeated, must at length lose both their nature and name, and become unfit proofs of any extraordinary revelation at all.

But let us consider a little both the propriety and the extent of the position itself. And here it must appear manifestly wrong, to lay down this, or indeed any general abstract rule, as holding uniformly and regularly in all cases of testimony; which are of so mixed and  
com-

complex a nature, and which depend SERMON  
V. upon, and are distinguished by, such an  almost infinite variety of circumstances.

Or should it for the most part hold good, yet it can be properly applied in no larger extent, than the foundation, on which it rests, will warrant; and this in the present case is the observed decrease of certainty in the propagation of *popular* and *ordinary reports*. But can any just inference be made from *oral* testimony; which, loose, unconnected, and broken at every step of its progress, gives free scope for every possible motive to operate, by which the truth of any fact may gradually suffer: can any just conclusion, I say, be made from so irregular a channel of information as this, to the case of *Literary Records*, in which every thing is fixed and permanent; and which, from several considerations that might be insisted on, contain just as full security against this progressive departure from truth, as the other affords ample opportunities for it?—Or if somewhat like this were in general granted even of *written* tradition; yet, unless it were strictly

ne-



SERMON  
V.

neccessary and unavoidable in the nature of things, many particular histories may be so circumstanced as to be entirely exempted from it: and it is certain, that each individual one has a right to be considered by itself, to have the merits of its own evidence examined apart, and to be judged by the weight of those peculiar circumstances which belong to its own conveyance.

The objection might perhaps be sufficiently answered by this general reasoning: but let us return, for a further refutation of it, to known fact.—It charges on the Gospel, in some periods of its passage, changes, forgeries, and corruptions.—If the charge be not a mere assumption undeserving of regard, it must recur for support to actual, to attested instances. A few have been suggested; but to whom are we indebted for the knowledge of them? Not to the enemies, but to the primitive defenders of christianity; who, with ample opportunities, and suitable abilities, exposed them publicly, for the satisfaction of their own times; and recorded them specifically, for the information

tion and direction of posterity. If therefore SERMON  
V.  
it be certain, that attempts were ever made   
to falsify the gospel, it is not less certain  
that they were immediately detected and  
frustrated. The evidence, which subsists  
at present concerning this their detection,  
rests precisely upon the same authority,  
as does that of their existence.

In this respect therefore, the credit of  
the sacred writings remains, at least, undi-  
minished by time: in other regards it is,  
perhaps, augmented and improved, par-  
ticularly by the accurate scrutiny of them,  
since the period of the reformation: in the  
progress of which have arisen some new  
proofs of their authenticity. Thus the argu-  
ment, taken from the general exact agree-  
ment in essential matters of all the manu-  
scripts of the New Testaments, of what-  
ever age, and wherever found, was before  
unthought of; while those manuscripts  
lay buried in their separate recesses, and  
dispersed in the distant regions of the  
world. It was from diligent collations of  
G them,

SERMON  
V.  
them, with a faithful notation of the minute differences, that the proof resulted.

And this was a proof of a growing nature; gathering new strength as fast as fresh copies appeared, and increasing its validity in proportion to their variety and number. The same reflexion will hold good of most, if not of all the external rules, by which the purity of the Evangelic History is supported; the uniform appearance of all the versions of it in every different language, the concurrence of the large citations from it in the earliest Christian writers, and the confirmation given to it both by Jewish and by Pagan cotemporaries.

These, and the like evidences, are of modern growth; owing, in a great measure to the revival of literature, more especially to one branch of it, in preceding times hardly known or but superficially cultivated, I mean, critical learning: not barely that minute and confined species, which is employed in the examination of verbal matters; but the more enlarged  
and

and extensive exercise of it, which, in SERMON  
union with a knowledge of the lan- V.  
guages, and an acquaintance with the  
genius, customs, and transactions of past  
ages, hath indeed proved the most use-  
ful instrument of ascertaining the genu-  
ineness of all ancient writings; but with  
respect to the records of our religion  
particularly, hath, besides distinguishing  
spurious imitations, deduced the convey-  
ance of them down from the times of the  
apostles to our own, marked the several  
removes, shewn those removes to have  
been in fact but few, and at each step de-  
monstrated the identity of the gospels  
then in use with those of which we are  
possessed at this day.

So far then is this notion of a progressive  
and regular diminution of the credit of all  
historical relations, in proportion to the  
number of ages through which they are  
conveyed, from being just; that it appears  
to be altogether groundless and chimeri-  
cal. The comparison of the state of the  
scripture records in the present, and in dif-



SERMON

V.

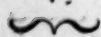
ferent periods of past ages, affords not barely an exception to, but a direct confutation of, the rule. And, in truth, this decrease, so often as it actually happens, is owing immediately and properly to quite other causes, than distance or length of time; to a spirit of fraud, which contrives and propagates forgeries; of laziness and supine indifference, which suffers valuable memorials to perish; of credulity which embraces truth and fiction indiscriminately; and of ignorance, alike unable to apply the means of ascertaining the one, or of detecting the other. Time is no otherwise concerned in the effect, than by accident. Those real causes may take place in the shortest space of time, and may not in the longest; just as the peculiar circumstances, disposition, and leading principles of each succeeding age happen to promote, or discourage, their prevalence and operation. But to suppose in general, that either religious, or indeed any history, must, from some inherent and necessary efficiency of time, suffer a sensible and constant abatement of its truth,  
and

and sink continually from one degree of SERMON V. uncertainty to a greater, is as little conformable to fact and experience, as is it ill supported by the reason of the thing itself.

I have not digressed in these observations from my proper subject: for if the evangelic history be really attended with such advantageous circumstances of credibility, and so far removed from defect or decay; the similar state of the miracles, which it relates, and which the text expressly enforces on notice, must be included in it, and follow by necessary consequence. But I beg leave to particularize one eminent confirmation of them, evolved by course of time; and that is, the existence of christianity itself: which, considering the almost insurmountable obstacles of every kind, that lay in the way of its progress, if the extraordinary facts, on which it was built, were all the while fictitious and unreal, must itself be looked upon as the greatest miracle that ever appeared in the world.

SERMON

V.



If then the wondrous works of our Lord have still an unimpaired title to admission, as real facts; something yet more positive may be advanced, in respect to their validity, as proofs of a commission from Heaven. Many of the Jews, even while our Saviour manifested his signs and wonders daily before their eyes, and pointed to his works as credentials of his coming from God, saw not, or at least acknowledged not, the force of this proof; some resolving all his actions into the co-operation of evil spirits, and others, in after-ages, evading it by yet more frivolous and improbable solutions. And the Heathen world, who had in general a strong persuasion of the powers of magic, had recourse to the influence of this principle to account for every alarming performance, which they could not otherwise explain, and the testimony of which they knew not how to invalidate.

This ignorance of nature, and of God, retarded, it is certain, for some time, the  
gene-

general reception of the Gospel. But SERMON  
V.  
neither of these causes at present sub-  
sists, as a bar to the credibility of the  
Christian revelation, and its miraculous  
supports. For, as the improved insight  
into nature, occasioned by the cultivation  
and advancement of sound philosophy,  
has exploded the unmeaning pretences of  
forcery and magic, and afforded the means  
of distinguishing real miracles from the  
feats of artifice, or the illusions of craft;  
so the more informed knowledge of the  
Supreme Being, introduced by inquisitive  
investigation, and studious reforms of reli-  
gion, directs us at once to refer every truly  
miraculous event to the Great Governor  
of all things: by whose power alone as  
the course of nature is incessantly conduct-  
ed in every part, so by his immediate act  
or express appointment only can it be at  
any time interrupted or over-ruled. And  
therefore, so far as both the nature of a  
true miracle, and the conclusion thence  
deducible in favour of the Christian Reve-  
lation, is more generally understood; this



SERMON  
V.  
age may be thought in such respect to have  
a privilege of evidence over every other,  
which has preceded it.

We now, upon the whole, see the force of the text in its full extent, or the supernatural pretensions of Christ amply confirmed by supernatural works; confirmed to those who reported them by the clearest conviction, and to us who examine them by the securest attestation; by all or most of the documents which they had, with some incidental lights and adventitious aids, which they had not. May we improve these advantages: considering the works for the sake of their author, and revering the author for the sake of his works, may we seriously look up through him to God, with gratitude for the gift of his revelation; with gratitude demonstrated in reflection on its blessings, and obedience to its dictates, through Jesus Christ, &c.

---

## S E R M O N VI.

---

John xv.—24.

*If I had not done among them the Works  
which none other Man did, they had not  
had sin.*

**I**N the evidences of the truth of Christi- SERMON VI.  
anity, the miracles of its Author stand   
distinguished with pre-eminence. Let me  
engage your notice of them ; that serious  
notice, which their importance challenges,  
by some useful reflections. In the words  
I have read to you, our Saviour indirectly  
presses them on consideration by a solemn  
charge of inexcusable guilt on the un-  
believing Jews for obduracy, after a con-  
firmation of his divine commission by those  
credentials. The charge implies at once  
notoriety

SERMON  
VI.

notoriety in the display, and omnipotent agency in the performance, of them.

Let us see then, in prosecution of a former subject, whether they were in truth, according to the intimation of the text, beyond human acts, and beyond natural powers, or, in other words, real miracles; such as man never did, and without the co-operation of God never could, perform.

1. The first circumstance, whether Jesus wrought among the Jews acts superiour to those of any other man, seems to be a point of history, which a short comparison of Him, with his predecessors in divine delegations, will easily establish. Moses fed the Israelites with bread sent down from Heaven; but He upon earth multiplied a few loaves and fishes to the sustenance of many thousands; Elias raised one from the dead; but He raised three, the widow's son of Naim, the daughter of Jairus, and Lazarus who had been four days in the grave. The ancient prophets proved their commission by inflictions of  
divine

divine vengeance; but our Saviour characterised his miracles by a conspicuous peculiarity, that they were all *beneficial* to mankind: infomuch that through the whole term of his Ministry there is not one instance, in which He manifested his power by harm even to his enemies. The law was enacted with pomp and terror, suitable to a dispensation of severity and servitude; but the Gospel is a covenant of reconciliation and peace, intended not so much to impress awe, as to conciliate the soothed mind by all the endearing methods of gentleness and love: hence the wonders, which bore testimony to its truth, were works of mercy; and the kind relief, which they brought to the body of the sufferer, resembled the infinite compassion, which the great Worker of them expressed for the soul of the sinner. “The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped, the lame shall leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing,” is a prophecy denoting the nature of the miracles,  
which

SERMON

VI.



SERMON

VI.

which the Messiah was to exhibit. And when John sent his disciples to satisfy themselves concerning Christ; our Saviour bids them return with a report, that “the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the dead are raised up:” as if the mention of these facts might serve for conviction, who he was, and by what authority he acted.

2. In this short detail is sufficiently exemplified the first point; that Our Saviour did among the Jews such works, such in number, such in quality, as no other divine missionary had ever done:---the next particular for discussion is, whether these extraordinary works were *real miracles*.

1. Against their admission, as such, has been alledged an antecedent and abstract presumption of *impossibility*. It is remarked, that the frame of the visible world is disposed with uniformity, that its motions are also preserved with methodical process; so that there is a constant suc-  
cession

cession of effects regularly following their SERMON VI. causes, as it were by a stated law or rule;  and it has been from hence imagined, that the course of nature is something so fixed, as never on any occasion to admit any change, which is, in import, any miracle: as if the material world were something entirely independent on the will of God, and had in itself original powers, which no intelligent being could either limit or control.

From an indistinct and ambiguous use of the word, *nature*, (which signifies either the system, or the regulating principle of creation) men are apt to confound causes and effects: hence ascribing an *active* faculty to the things themselves, which are merely passive and acted upon. This leads them to think, that what they call the course of nature cannot be altered, except by some power superior to that which preserves it. And this will at last terminate in a supposition, that the world preserved itself; or that there is no necessity of divine interposition in the conduct, nor by consequence of divine contrivance

SERMON  
VI.

trivance in the construction of it. Whereas, if they would distinguish between that which really acts, and that which is the subject of action only, they might be convinced, that, as the material world or any part of it hath no will or power of its own, nor can ever of itself begin motion or action; so whatever is moved or acted upon, must originally and ultimately be moved or acted upon by some intelligent and free being; that accordingly, all things which are done, all the effects which are produced in the world, ordinary or extraordinary, proceed either immediately from God himself, or subordinately from some inferiour intelligence, authorised by him, imposing the law or impressing the force, by which they are determined: so that properly speaking, the course of nature is in general nothing else but that continual uniform manner, in which the supreme intelligent Being produces certain effects according to his own will. And this manner of action, depending in every particular instant on his will, may be at any instant, if He see fit, as easily

easily altered, as continued. So that what SERMON VI.  
we call a miracle requires no more power   
in the real agent, than that does which we  
call the course of nature.

Men may, if they please, call the working of a miracle, a violation of, or contradiction to, the laws of nature. But then they should consider what they mean by laws of nature; and not make a free and intelligent Being necessarily subject to those laws of material motion, by which that Being chooses ordinarily to produce such and such common effects; which we call natural, because they are usual and constant: not that they are antecedently necessary, in respect of the first agent; whether it be the supreme, or any other intelligent Being, which has a delegated power of acting, and not barely a capacity of being acted upon. It follows accordingly, that miracles are not impossible, if we believe this power of a governing intelligence, and the actual exertion of it in the constant preservation of what we call the course of nature. It



## SERMON

## VI.



It follows again, that the credibility of miracles is capable of rational proof.

Wherever they are wrought, they are matters of fact; proveable, as other facts are, by proper evidence. And though I cannot give a mechanical account of the manner how they are done, because they are done by the unusual interposition of an invisible agent, superiour both in power and in wisdom to myself; I must not therefore deny the fact which my own senses testify to be done. The truth is, we can no more solve the ordinary phænomena of nature without having recourse at last to an intelligent being; than we can those extraordinary ones, which we call miracles. In the former indeed, we know more of the circumstances which precede and follow; because we see them more frequently, and are acquainted with them more familiarly. But still the first mover is the same in both; and as he testifies in one case a constant interposition of his providence, acting mediately or immediately; so does he in the other likewise evince an extraordinary interposition

terposition on a rare and extraordinary oc- SERMON VI.  
casion. No man will say, that a greater  
power is requisite to reanimate a dead body ;  
than at first to make it, and afterwards to  
preserve it: If therefore I believe the one,  
though I can give no account of the man-  
ner how it was done ; why should I be  
so much concerned to find out the manner,  
in which the other must be done; or else  
think it impossible? A miracle is sup-  
posed to be an event which rarely occurs,  
which happens only on special occasions,  
and is not therefore to be expected in every  
age: but is it therefore incredible, that  
such an event should ever have occurred,  
because it is not experienced every day? Or  
have I any reason to disbelieve miracles well  
attested, and not repugnant to the goodness  
or justice of God, but on the contrary  
highly conducive to the manifestation of  
both ; because they were only done in for-  
mer ages: any more than I have to dis-  
believe the more ordinary acts of Providence,  
which passed before my own time; because  
the same acts, in a continued train, may, per-  
H haps

SERMON  
VI.

haps in the course of my life never recur?

I would not encourage credulity: nor would I run from it into scepticism. In all circumstances the true way to avoid both extremes is to compare arguments, and be determined by suitable evidence: for it is not less unreasonable, to believe false, than to believe true, every thing which depends on the relation of others. I venture accordingly to conclude, that there lies against miracles no presumption of impossibility, sufficient to set aside a proper attestation of them.

II. But the possibility of this proper attestation is still controverted. It is said by a late writer, whose pen was worthy of a more ingenuous and useful employ, that “there is not to be found in all history any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men of such unquestioned good sense, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusion in themselves; of such undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others

others; of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a great deal to lose in case of being detected in a falshood; and at the same time attesting facts performed in such a public manner, and in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable: all which circumstances are requisite to give us a full assurance in the testimony of men \*." I should not be afraid to rest the whole cause of Christianity, or the whole credit of the miracles which confirm the truth of it, on a trial according to this representation. It possesses amply and substantially, as to its miracles, if I mis-judge not from an attachment to the purity of its moral precepts, all the circumstances of evidence here prescribed.

The first is, a sufficient number of witnesses. And there never was, perhaps, a fact directly attested by so many, as the miracles under consideration. We have still upon record the express depositions of several, in the writings of the Apostles.

\* Hume's Essay on Miracles:



SERMON  
VI.

The conversion of every single person to the religion, which these facts respected, was indeed a clear and precise testimony to the truth of them: for this religion was wholly built on their support. Besides the twelve Apostles, and the seventy Disciples chosen to preach the Gospel, a multitude of others were converted by the miracles and resurrection of Christ. But all those others, who gave this witness to the miracles of the Apostles (if I may be allowed to add them) were without number. Never was there a doctrine, that spread so swiftly through the world, or that gained so many present and immediate witnesses to its truth.

The Apostles and first Disciples had not, many of them, the advantages of education and learning. But what learning is required to enable men to see with their eyes, and hear with their ears? The miracles they attest were plain facts, the objects of sense. Folly itself could not be deceived in them: and sure folly could never so successfully

fully deceive. These men, illiterate as SERMON VI. they were, and void of art or eloquence, did,  what, I trust, their opponents will never, with all the arguments of tasked ingenuity, be able to effect: they got the better of all the religions that divided the world around them, and established their own in different and distant countries. They had therefore, we may hope, sufficient understanding, to testify what their senses had indubitably distinguished.

And their integrity remains without a suggestion against it. They had not, perhaps, any great reputation to lose. But the good name of an inferiour person is as dear to him as that of the greatest. If they had no public character to lose, they had public infamy to dread: and this they incurred, not by being detected in a falshood, but by persevering in the truth. If it was little that they gave up to follow Christ; it was, however, all that they had; and what they gained was a negative acquisition, and must be put to the side of their losses: they

SERMON  
VI.

gained hunger and thirst, toil and labour, watchings and fastings, scorn and reproach, scourgings and death. They lost then enough to evidence their sincerity. They gave every proof, that ever was given by man, to the truth of their testimony.

As to the celebrity of the facts, they were done in the most public manner; in places of constant resort: many of them in Jerusalem, at times of the greatest concourse. And what is more, they were done in direct opposition to the prejudices of all that saw them; before the most vigilant and powerful enemies, who did not, as, this writer tells us, wise men commonly do, “think the matter too inconsiderable to deserve their attention,” but exerted their utmost industry and authority in suppressing this new religion: putting its head and leader to death, suborning false witnesses to discredit him and his miracles, and proceeding immediately, by imprisoning some, and killing others, to deter and disperse his followers. These miracles there-

therefore were wrought on the very spot SERMON VI.  
where their detection was most certain and   
unavoidable: and the testimony given to  
them was given in the same public manner,  
and in the same place.

III. The possibility of miracles in general, and of a proper attestation confirming them, may, after what has been offered, it is presumed, be admitted. But are we assured after all that the acts of Jesus, however pre-eminent, or such as none other man did, were intrinsically true miracles? A miracle is confessedly an effect exceeding the power of nature: unless, therefore, we know the utmost extent of the power of nature, and that who pretends; how are we to know what exceeds it, or consequently, whether any event be miraculous? It may be granted, that we do not know the utmost extent of the power of nature, perhaps, in any one thing: yet it does not follow, that we know not the nature of any thing in a degree, and to the extent of that degree with a precision ap-



SERMON  
VI.

proaching to certainty. Though I cannot tell how wonderful and sudden an increase of corn might be produced by a warm climate, fertility of soil, and a concurrence of other causes: yet this I can certainly know, that there is not, in the sound of two or three words spoken, a natural force to multiply one small loaf of bread so speedily in the breaking of it; as that it should, not apparently in mere shew only, amuse the eyes, but truly and really satisfy the appetites of several thousand hungry persons, and produce afterwards fragments more in substance than the bread was at first. Nor again is there, in a similar fiat of a simple word, a similar force to raise the dead, and cure diseases. If, therefore, we are not acquainted with the utmost extent of the nature, yet we may certainly discern what is contrary to the nature, of several things, with which we are acquainted: and hence, though there may be profound wonders, and apparent miracles, in which we may be deceived; yet,

yet there are some things, in which we may be certain. To the test of this knowledge then, which resolves itself ultimately into the assurance of sense, may be securely referred the miracles of Christ. SERMON  
VI.

The result of the whole is, that these miracles, on which our Blessed Lord lays in the text such stress, remain still, in full validity, real, possible, probable, surpassing natural powers, repelling elaborate objections, condemning impotent objectors. May we, therefore, not incur a participation of Jewish criminality by rejecting them, by disbelieving what He did, or disobeying what He taught! A religion with such pretence of extraction may challenge some consideration, a religion with such supports of evidence some observance. May its faith be our principle, its virtue our praise, its felicity our lot, through Jesus Christ, &c.

---

## S E R M O N VII.

---

Phil. ii.---6, 7, 8.

*Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God,---but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men,---and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto Death, even the Death of the Cross.*

SERMON  
VII.

WHATEVER may be precisely implied in the first part of this passage, with whatever restriction or comprehension may be interpreted the peculiar expressions of “being in the form,” having the essence or the appearance, “of a God;” of “being equal” in quality or in

in consideration, "with a God", and of SERMON  
VII. "thinking it not robbery," an encroachment, or an object of fond tenaciousness, a proprietary, an unresignable advantage, to be so; in short, whatever dignity, power, privileges or perfections the Saviour of mankind might inherently or derivatively possess before his human manifestation, one conclusion seems plainly deducible, not only from the natural construction of the language, but from the evident scope of the argument to enforce humility; that he degraded himself, that he passed from a prior to a posterior existence, from a better state to a worse, from a higher character to a lower. "He made himself of no reputation;" the original phrase is still more emphatic, He emptied, he vilified, he annulled himself, his proper self, he voided his primitive importance, he discharged his genuine glories; "taking the form or appearance of a slave:" that is, I conceive, in the servile punishment of his crucifixion; for the import of the words is surely too forcible for the  
mere



SERMON  
VII.

mere discharge, or for any particular act, of his ministry. And, in view, to verify or explain this leading and general account, as I understand the subsequent clauses, the Apostle subjoins that, “being made in likeness or resemblance of men,” that is, humanly born, “and being found in fashion, scheme, or exterior figure, as a man,” that is, adopting, with a visibility subject to remark, the habits of human life, “he humbled or debased himself, becoming obedient,” or, through a course of passive compliance with the decree of heaven, submissive, to, the last possible instance, “Death;” even farther, to a mode of death, marked in that age with deep opprobrium, suspension on the Cross!

What Humility! what Philanthropy! an Exalted, an Immortal Being lays aside his honours, quits heaven for earth, and reveals himself in a personal visit to mankind; submitting for that end to a participation of their nature, which, considering the stages of their growth, the tardy, the difficult,

difficult, the circumscribed advances of <sup>SERMON</sup>  
their improvement, the littleness of their <sup>VII.</sup>   
actions, and the contemptibleness of their  
enjoyments, the weakneses of their frame,  
and the accidents of their situation, is at  
best a sordid mansion for a pure spirit of  
high intelligence; and not only to the  
participation of this mansion with these  
common disadvantages, but to the most  
disreputable and most painful circumstances  
of it, obscurity, labour, indigence, affliction,  
and contumely. Never was errand more  
interesting, or less acceptable: never was  
innocence more conspicuous, or more per-  
secuted. The choice and the purpose com-  
plete the miracle, and the value of this  
humiliation. It was not a forced submis-  
sion; it was not a mere destiny or lot in  
the order of providence; but the voluntary  
effect of benevolent condescension. To ex-  
piate our guilt, he sustained our punishment:  
that we might appropriate his merits, he  
went through the conflict with our miseries.  
And he did both spontaneously, to promote  
our happiness.

But

SERMON  
VII.

But we are called off from admiring this illustrious favour, to defend it. There are, it seems, who are scandalized at the ignoble and distressful appearance of Christ; as a degradation, unnecessary to his mission, and unworthy of his character. They think that he ought to have manifested himself with secular power or pomp, conquests or accomplishments; that he ought to have shone out majestic and pre-eminent among mortals, possessed of every innocent distinction which might attract notice, or at least of every accommodation which might minister delight. Yet it is easy to conceive this demand improper, and I will endeavour in the sequel to prove it so; by obvious reflections on his humiliation, and its intended, its wise reference to the ends, or to the illustrations, of his mission.

The ends of his mission were to redeem from sin, to teach pure righteousness, and to dispense these, or whatever else, his benefits universally.

I. In redemption from sin, to discharge SERMON  
VII.  
the guilt, to avert the consequences, to depress the influence of it, some exemplary state equivalent to punishment, or some meritorious act equivalent to recompence, by which offended justice might be satisfied, yet with a becoming manifestation of displeasure against disobedience, seems requisite. But how can either take place without abasement or suffering, without some variation of condition from better to worse? Amidst ease, elevation, prosperity, amidst authority, commanding homage, or glory attracting admiration, where is the awful process of displeasure, the procedure or the opportunity of trial to exert merit, of terror to impress warning, or maltreatment to inflict punishment?

II. A like hopeless in similar circumstances would be the design of teaching the pure righteousness of the Gospel. It will not surely be said, that prosperity can spread any real lustre, or stamp any real value, on the character of a moral teacher;  
much



SERMON  
VII.

much less, that it can establish a certain proof of a heavenly commission. Nor ought it to be said, that affliction positively derogates from his authority or credit; since the good are often observably sufferers, and the bad still more often gainers, in the promiscuous allotments of temporal fortune: so far therefore the objection obtains no advantage. It should seem, in the next place, that the very office of a teacher, on an enlarged plan of general reformation, implying a free intermixture with persons of all conditions, is inconsistent with any high superiority of rank, or indulgence: or, however this be, that the purified morality of the Gospel at least required a simple and humble teacher. It was an unaffected address to unprejudiced reason, excluding consequently every overbearing influence, or ostentatious appearance; and the chief constituents of it were, meekness, charity, and peace, humility, purity, patience and contentment. Now, I appeal to any candid judge, with what propriety could a martial hero, ensanguined by conquest, or  
ardent

ardent for exploit, inculcate meekness, charity, and peace? With what consistency, with what impression, would the magnificent possessor of dominion or abundance, uncircumscribed in power or gratification, deliver lessons of humility, purity, patience, and contentment? But the aim of these virtues, and indeed the whole aim of Christianity, is, to discipline the passions, to control the desires, to rectify the views, and regulate the pursuits of earth and earthly objects; to give the reflecting mind a conception of, an interest in, an aspiration to, the concerns of a future life: and would not this aim have been obstructed by any visible splendor of the Monitor charged with the execution of it? The passions most fertile in mischief, those which are most at variance with feelings and obligations, which create most vices in the moral, and most disturbances in the political world, and which, depending on imaginary wants, and imaginary worth, present great proofs of weakness too, are the grasping desires of power, possessions, and honours. Had our

SERMON  
VII.

Saviour therefore in his mission assumed exaltation, atchieved victories, or glittered with opulence ; would he not have added to the force of those unhappy propensities, and their effects ? Would he not have encouraged them and dignified the objects of them beyond the true standard of their estimation, with a proportionate diminution of regard to the great objects of futurity ?

III. But let us remark farther on the plan of his mission, that the intended benefits of it were declaredly, and as originating in the counsels of an equal governor, the great parent of the universe, must be undoubtedly, comprehensive without limitation. Now unlimited comprehension in any allotment of secular advantage is impossible. The aggrandisement of nations is in general by conquest, the establishment of dominion is by subjection, the rapid accumulation of treasure, by spoil, the acquisition of honour by pre-eminence or preference. But conquest implies in its very nature slaughter, a dear price for a much  
more

more valuable purchase; subjection implies restraint effected by prevalent force; spoil a transferral of possessions or rights; pre-eminence or preference depression; and there is no conceivable assignment of temporal superiority, without deduction from others of property or enjoyment, without some distressful encroachment, or invidious partiality. Had Jesus therefore seconded the ambitious expectation of the Jews in leading them to glory or liberty, had he taken up the patronage of any particular society and its interests, had he assumed any particular rank or figure in any community, or in short had his blessings been other than spiritual; he would have been at best the renowned chieftain, statesman, patriot, or partisan, the auxiliary of an enterprise or the pageant of a shew; not the irrespective benefactor: and the ensigns of majesty, or the gloss of magnificence, would have hidden the true form, or disguised at least one genuine lineament, of the son of God.

SERMON  
VII.



SERMON  
VII.

I observed, at setting out, that not only the ends, but the illustrations, of his mission required the appearance described in his history. Let us turn then to this point of view. I mean by the illustrations here hinted, the evidence of his pretensions, and the enforcement or recommendation of his example.

1. The first evidence of his pretensions, or of his heavenly origin was, the circumstantial correspondence of his character with the prophetic notices of the Messiah. In these he is depicted sometimes with traits of majesty, triumph and power ; but sometimes also with deep and darkening additions of scorn and tribulation. The expressions of his greatness explain themselves, without strained construction, in his sovereignty over nature, his spiritual conquests, the progress and splendor of revealed truth, the solemnity of his second manifestation in judgment, or the glory of his subsequent kingdom. But the intimations of his disrepute and sorrow nothing can fairly interpret,

pret, but humiliation embittered by persecution. He is said to be "A root growing out of a dry or thirsty ground;" that is, in the natural language of the sultry East, a poor plant exposed in an unfriendly soil to raging heats, without shelter or refreshment. He is represented as "having no form nor comeliness," no exterior dignity or attraction, "as despised, a man of sorrows, one that hideth his face," like a mourner, as "wounded" "and smitten," as "one, whom, though guiltless, it pleased Jehovah to crush with affliction," as "numbered with transgressors," as "taken off by an oppressive judgment," as "cut off from the land of the living." Had he therefore not literally verified these accounts, had he not submitted to the disparaging and distressful circumstances, which they import; his resemblance to the exemplar of the Prophets had been defective, and his claim to the title of Messiah suspicious.

SERMON  
VII.

SERMON  
VII.

2. But his humiliation had a farther effect on the credit of his pretensions: in demonstrating with full lustre, by instruments of operation naturally inadequate, the aid of omnipotence, both, in his doctrines, and in his works. Estranged as he thus was, by converse in the lower walks, and employment in the meaner forms of life, from schools and from Sages, from the improvements of science, and the arts of eloquence; he plainly derived from a supernatural source the dexterity with which he disengaged himself from ensnaring questions, the readiness with which he resolved the profoundest doubts, and the strength of reasoning with which he silenced Scribes and Pharisees. Nor will the mere force of human capacity account for his ability to frame that scheme of redemption, those admirable rules of life, those effectual and comprehensive directions to happiness; or for his delivery of them with that energy, clearness, and authority, which are to be found in his discourses.

His

His actions derive the same advantage from the same meanness of condition. SERMON  
VII.

Had he possessed wealth, renown, or influence, had he been ornamented with the talents of human genius, or the accomplishments of human art, had he been employed in deep researches and curious speculations, with leisure for application to knowledge, and means of procuring it; his performances, however extraordinary, would have excited less wonder. It might have been alledged, that he wrought them by the aid of study and profound investigation, by insight into natural causes, by special intelligence in the process or remedies of diseases. And it might possibly have been imagined, that he displayed his mysterious skill for private ends; to adorn or propagate a name, to acquire or preserve an emolument, grandeur, or power. But the obscurity of his situation, the meanness of his fortune, his mortified temper, his refusal to exert his mighty gifts for his own interest, or even his own safety, disarm at once these captious pretences, exhibit une-



SERMON  
VII.

quivocally the association of a Divine Spirit, and with additional force enhance his miracles.

3. The last instance suggested of advantage, resulting from the ignoble circumstances of Christ to the illustration of his mission, was in their operation derived from his example; by which they served, to heighten the honour, extend the utility, and exalt the obligation. Prosperity hath undoubtedly its temptations to repel, and its virtues to exercise, alike with adversity. It calls forth into exertion humility, temperance, charity, and piety; in all which there may be self-government, or self-denial: but the virtues of a suffering state are surely marked with greater difficulty. They imply, in the very notion of them, opposition and conflict, danger and pain, an endurance of labours which go against the grain of human nature, and an exclusion from comforts which sweeten and endear human life. On such events, to stand, to preserve with unerring decorum, to face danger with-

without concern, not to be disordered with pain, not to be dispirited with injury; and to sustain insult or scorn without criminal compliance, especially too, with a generous superiority to station, in the voluntary delivery of unacceptable truths, on a charitable design of public, abstracted from personal, service; argues at once a firm intrepidity which is true heroism, an exertion of reason which is true liberty, and a benevolent integrity which is true merit. Such proofs of illustrious virtue gave Jesus by his humiliation.

But by these proofs of virtue, in consequence of humiliation, if he heightened the honour, he also extended the utility of his example. Considering the circumstances of human life; that it has a certain termination often painfully lingering, that it is beset with disasters often formidably menacing, that it is filled with obloquies and petty persecutions, against which even probity, even merit, is no safe-guard; considering too, that a large majority of mankind

SERMON  
VII.

kind are doomed to labour in obscurity with scanty accommodations; as strength of mind must be of high importance, and principles of consolation more needful than any other rudiments of tuition, the passive virtues and their supports seem to be of most universal use: which our Saviour accordingly demonstrated, and could only demonstrate, by indigence and suffering, to be within the compass of attainment. It was thus, that he explored what he taught by experiment, and interpreted the true meaning of it by an explicit comment, It was thus, that by going before those whom he taught, and asking of them no more than he held out in exertion, he put remissness and cowardice out of countenance: and it was thus, that exhibiting a trial of his lessons on himself, he guarded both himself and them from a common incident of other teachers and other systems; that of practical refutation, with recoiling blame, by devious and irreconcilable behaviour.

With

With utility, in the exhibition of these passive virtues, unites obligation ; obligation still farther conducive to the advancement of his religion by the endearment of his memory. Through whatever medium, with whatever circumstances he had communicated his religion ; it had still merited respectful attention, and particular acknowledgements. But loss, condescension, trouble, defiance of dangers, and perseverance under miseries, unquestionably distinguish good-will, and enhance favour. Our Saviour consequently, by these demonstrations of kindness, or by entrance into the condition which enabled him to produce them, added new desert to his praise, and new force to his laws. He rooted, or entwisted both into the affections ; and the stronger the impression of this kindness, the more firm, the more effectual will be the establishment of those laws, by the grateful obedience of his followers ; which will at once prove the wisdom of his conduct, and the ingenuoufness of theirs.

I would



SERMON  
VII.

I would hope that no additional considerations are now wanted to vindicate the degrading submission recorded in the text. May it, and its arguments, induce us to think with more reverence of our Maker and his counsels, with more gratitude of our Redeemer and his love, with more earnestness of our religion and its instructions; that the same mind may be in us, which was in Christ Jesus, and that we may follow him in the steps of his exemplary progress from profession to practice, from obedience to acceptance, from virtue to glory in life everlasting.

Ms. No 31 October 1800

S E R M O N.

125

---

S E R M O N VIII.

---

Gen. 22.—1, 2, 3.

*And it came to pass, after these things, that God did tempt Abraham; and said unto him, Abraham. And he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a Burnt-offering, upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the Burnt-offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.*

**W**E are struck in this passage, which SERMON  
VIII. delivers the commanded oblation of Isaac by Abraham, with a curious record of Sacred History. Regarded merely  
as

SERMON  
VIII.

as a narrative, it is simple, circumstantial, and interesting: considered as a fact, a memorable trial and triumph of duty, the most extraordinary instance of submission ever exacted, the most extraordinary instance of service ever paid. It is called in the text a temptation; which means not, as generally in popular language, solicitation to a crime, or a designed occasion of guilt; but proof of adherence, or exercise of moral agency, by a task of pain, and a terour of calamity. In this sense must God, as his attributes repel every criminal or odious imputation, be supposed to tempt Abraham: permitting an experiment on his piety in an assault on his resignation, to display, perfect, and crown it; in short, a conflict leading to conquest, and a danger terminating in honour.

That we may see this conflict with full lustre; let us remark the circumstances which distinguished it, and the opposing difficulties, through which the Father of the Faithful carried his resolution.

They rose in solemn gradation from self-denial to sorrow, from loss to bloodshed. SERMON  
VIII.  
His loss alone must have been no inconsiderable perplexity. Isaac, the chosen offering, was a son wound round his heart by affection, still more by familiarity; a son, for whom he had earnestly waited twenty years; a son, who had been welcomed by the congratulations of assembled friends on a special festivity dedicated to that purpose; a son, whom he had reared with a particularly tender attention, to cheer his life, and to lament his death: yet farther, the son of his decline, towards the close of his day, when he might want assistance, by an aged wife, when the laws of nature seemed to preclude the hope of off-spring; now too, the son of refuge to him, in a state of destitution, when the necessary removal of Ismael had left him bereft of filial society, amidst large felicities of fortune, wealth, renown, power, without an heir remaining, except Eliezer, a steward, or at most a collateral kinsman, to whom he might transfer them.

Com-



SERMON  
VIII.

Combined with these circumstances, which attacked his comfort, were others, which might startle and stagger his piety. This darling son had been ushered into the world with peculiar preparation. His birth had been announced by God himself, with a reassurance of it in a personal visit by angels. He was the subject of covenants, the center of prophetic promises, the destined source of diffusive blessings. Abraham had been repeatedly instructed to anticipate through him an exuberant posterity, a progeny of kings, and even the joy of all nations, the Saviour of mankind. He had changed his name with an allusive view to this posterity; had been acquainted with the grand destination of them; that they were to be proprietors in that land, in which he was by a special call from Chaldea for the purpose of settling them a stranger; and with a particular incident of their history, their restoration from a foreign tyranny after an oppression of four hundred years. Could God be supposed at once to obliterate these designs, and frustrate these expectations?

Could

Could wisdom counter-act, or veracity contradict itself? If not immutable, could he be an object of trust? Or if mutable, might he not with more propriety retract or relax his present harsh appointment in pursuance of his former decrees, than all his former decrees in pursuance of his present harsh appointment? If he delighted in illusion, where was his justice; if in blood, where was his mercy?

SERMON  
VIII.

The calamity of a loss thus unaccountable was additionally embittered by the manner of it. It was to be incurred by violence perpetrated by Abraham with his own hand; the act slaughter, the sufferer a son, an only, a beloved son, the slayer his father. Might no other pledge of obedience be accepted, but Isaac? Or if Isaac were alone eligible for the sacrifice, was Abraham alone admissible as the performer of it? Could cruelty be piety? Could he not be the votary of God, without treading upon the rights, and the feelings, of man; without disregarding not only every

K

joy

SERMON  
VIII.

joy that endears a child, but every tie that binds a parent? Those who have remarked the pleadings of humanity, those in particular, who have experienced the impulses and workings of parental tenderness, must be sensible, that the renunciation even of a disobedient and vicious child, still more the resignation of him to certain death, is a task on the powers of nature scarce supportable; that instinct will argue, to retain him, too forwardly, and often too forcibly, for reason; that imagining and participating his distress, especially the pangs of his expiring struggle, are unavoidable; and that the remembrance of his faults is easily lost in the sense of his sufferings. How much more then may this be supposed to happen in the case of an only favourite; gentle, unoffending, deserving, hopeful! How deeply must it pierce the sensibility of a good parent, not only to detach and relinquish him, but to adjudge his destruction; and not only to adjudge his destruction, but to inflict it, to be

S E R M O N.

131

be not only a spectator of this tragical deed, but the actor!

The deed becomes more formidable, if we consider, that it was performed in secrecy, and with protraction. Sarah was excluded from the participation of it : so were the servants who accompanied Abraham : he left them at a distance from the scene of it. He would not wound their sympathy, perhaps ; or he feared their opposition. Be this as conjectured. But what had he not to apprehend at his return, on the communication of the event, from the detestation, perhaps the misreport of the latter, from the keen and impetuous grief of the former, and from the obloquy of the world ; of surrounding acquaintance at least, whose reverence he might value, or whose envy he might wish to disappoint : in short, from the reflections and animadversions of each individually, much more of all conjunctively ; who might not be persuaded into a belief of the avowed com-

K 2

mand,

mand,



SERMON  
VIII.

mand, or who might consider the obligation of the command with less impression, than the horror of the fact. The privacy of the transaction might, the deliberateness of it must, bring an accession of misery. Moriah, whither he was ordered to repair, was not a particular mountain, but that tract, with the adjacent country, in which Jerusalem was built. It was three days journey from Beersheba, at that time the residence of the Patriarch: not necessarily by the extent of the distance, but casually, as he was circumstanced; travelling on foot, with two attendants, and with the incumbrance of the provision requisite for the Burnt-offering. It is in acts of virtue, as in acts of sin; they are heightened by deliberation: continued self-denial, repeated resistance of obstacles and dissuaves, distinguish more remarkably the one with presumption, the other with fortitude. Had Abraham, on the first notice of the Divine Will, with a rapid movement, at once thwarting his prepossessions and over-ruling his propensities,

cut the thread of his son's life ; his compliance might have appeared a precipitate extravagance, a sudden alienation of reason or sense, a transport of zeal hurried by surprise, or blinded by Enthusiasm. But the space interposed between the injunction, and the execution of it, laid upon his mind for three days the bodings and misgivings of expectation ; and that expectation, which lessens pleasure, but aggravates pain, gave him opportunity to cool and recollect, to examine and feel, to struggle with the checks of relenting pity, to hear again and again every powerful remonstrance of every interested passion : and it cannot therefore be doubted, that his trial was affectingly increased by the anxieties which tore him, and the efforts which exercised him, through the whole wearisome progress of this unwelcome journey.

At the close of it, as we draw near the final occurrence ; we are presented with a short conversation, which could not but operate on his compassion, and add to his

SERMON  
VIII.

distress. Apart from the attendants, when every thing is now ready for the oblation, we find the devoted victim accosting his father. "Isaac spake unto Abraham, his father, and said, my father." The call is answered, "Here am I, my son." And he said, "Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a Burnt-offering?" Abraham returns in reply, evasively; yet, as if prompted by the Spirit of Prophecy, in consequence truly, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a Burnt-offering." On this question of innocent surprize, with what expression it was uttered, and with what effect received, or, what emotions it roused and armed against the depending purpose, the heart alone can, perhaps, properly comment; the heart of an affectionate parent, good as Abraham, preparing to sacrifice a beloved son, deserving as Isaac.

Such was the temptation of Abraham; such were the discouragements, which confronted

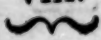
fronted him at the opening, such the per-  
plexities which multiplied upon him in the  
progression, of it ; discouragements which  
heighten the resignation of his faith, per-  
plexities which magnify the constancy of  
his resolution. Though he would rather  
probably have deprived himself, than Isaac,  
of life ; yet he would not set up his own  
apprehension against infinite intelligence.  
Abraham knew, that he was concerned with  
God ; with God, whom he could not but  
confess to be just, and might believe to be  
gracious ; with God, whose Providence is  
inscrutable, but undeniable. He would  
not, therefore, controvert either the ends,  
of which he might be the intended instru-  
ment, or the means, by which they might  
be accomplished. He trusted, and obeyed.

Here is surely in a submission, which  
seems to be the ready deference of one who  
discerned his duty, and in a perseverance  
which seems to be the consistent steadiness  
of one who not only discerned his duty, but  
would practise it, a subject of admiration.



SERMON  
VIII.

Yet it hath not escaped disparagement, There are who depreciate the conduct of Abraham, as not meritorious ; on the pretence, that false religion, co-operating with false policy, made the immolation of human victims common, or frequent, in the ancient world ; consequently not sufficiently startling, to excite aversion, and exercise resolution. The frequency of this absurd and barbarous usage is confessed ; but not at the time in which he lived, nor in the places with which he was connected, Chaldaea, Haran, Egypt, and Beerisheba ; or, if in Egypt, at a later period : nor hath research produced a single authentic instance to verify the assertion. Let it however pass : let the practice be supposed, in the age of Abraham, just beginning in Canaan ; where he had fixed his residence, and where it was afterwards peculiarly prevalent. Yet, among the Canaanites, as amongst other nations, it is known to have been adopted, in conciliating or averting preternatural interposition, only on extraordinary emergencies of enterprise, or calamity : of which there

there is, in the case of Abraham, no record, SERMON  
VIII.  
or suggestion. Even this point given up,  is it probable, that their idolatry would warp his piety; that he would be seduced by strangers, with whom he united in neighbourhood only, from the true God, by whom he had been favoured, to fictitious or foreign Gods, in whom he did not believe, and into a species of worship, at which humanity revolted? Let us advance yet farther. If all that is asked be granted, would his loss be less perplexing, his anguish less piercing, or consequently his persevering submission less meritorious, in the private sacrifice of an only favourite by his own hand; because he might find instances of other parents devoting their children, who might be loved less ardently, or spared more easily, to be sacrificed on a public demand perhaps, with the distinction of public pomp, by the legal ministers of superstition.

Leaving therefore this futile exception,  
I will now detain you no longer, than  
whilst I subjoin one short deduction from  
the

**SERMON  
VIII.**

the detail laid before you : that the obedience of Abraham in his remarkable trial conclusively implies the certainty of revelations. In what methods, or by what credentials, God may impart to chosen ministers the impression and conviction of his heavenly notices, it may not be easy to resolve. But it is plainly reasonable to think ; that, where-ever vouchsafed, they carry with them in some way or other infallible assurance, or they would be ineffectual and vain. Had Abraham in the least doubted, whether the sacrifice of his son were the will of heaven, he would never have consented to a deed opposed by so many startling difficulties. Believing therefore revelation in general possible, in the present instance credible, let us open our minds, without dissimulation, in speculation to its evidences, in practice to its influences, through Jesus Christ, &c.

S E R-

---

S E R M O N IX.

---

*And it came to pass, after these things, that God did tempt Abraham; and said unto him, Abraham. And he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a Burnt-offering, upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the Burnt-offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.*

**I**N this passage, which I have partly SERMON IX. considered already, and of which I stand engaged by promise to resume the illustration, occurs an eminent conquest of piety



**SERMON**  
**IX.**

piety over self-love, the magnanimous compliance of a good parent, with an awful demand by God of a beloved, only, son for a Burnt-offering; that son the subject of repeated prophecies, and the center of extensive hopes. An incident of revelation so remarkable hath not, we may suppose, escaped the strictures of Sceptical Inquisition. There are, who depreciate this action of Abraham as not meritorious, as not probably tasking him with any violent conflict; because prompted or encouraged by the frequency of human sacrifices in his superstitious age. On examination, in a former discourse this pretence appeared to be a false inference from an unproved assertion. There are again, who, to invalidate the credibility of the relation, and intendedly through it the sacred authority of the relater, arraign the command, as improbable, because improper; and the performance of the command, as not warrantable, because not reasonable. These allegations let us now consider.

It

Ist, Then it is said, that God could not presumptively, because not properly, *i. e.* consistently with justice, goodness, or wisdom, issue the severe command. SERMON  
IX.

But why? If God be the author of human life, and the creator of human faculties; hath He not a right over both: a proprietary right of resumption, to reclaim the one in any form, a sovereign right of direction to employ the other in any ministry, which shall appear to him eligible? Or were Abraham, and his son, by peculiar reserve, privileged with an immunity from this general jurisdiction? Had the latter received his being, or the former his power of action, with a condition, or a liberty of disobedience? If not, in commanding the sacrifice of Isaac by his father, where was the injustice, more than in revoking a loan, or vacating a trust, by a select and subject agent, for an approved and expedient end? Let us add the possibility of an equivalent; and the presumption of hardship again diminishes. Is the deprivation

SERMON

IX.

vation of life, the deprivation of certain felicity? Or cannot He, who commands the store-house of nature, consequently all the materials, or means of happiness in nature, provide a compensation for the loss of life to the sufferer, who resigns it; and as easily to the survivor, who instrumentally takes it? If he can, ought the demand of it in any instance, by any given agency, to be questioned and censured, as a caprice of tyranny?

I argue thus, even on the harsh idea, that God designed, or appeared to design, in the injunction to Abraham, destruction only. But the intent of it is declaredly, in the representation of Scripture, temptation or trial. And is trial, moral trial, repugnant to justice or goodness? Is it not fit to explore virtue for employ, to exercise it for improvement, to display it for example, to ascertain trust in resignation, and merit for reward? Is it not possible, that virtue in action may be self-applause and exultation in feeling; that deliverance may overpay conflict,

conflict, that anxiety may season and augment enjoyment? If these fitnesses, and these possibilities may be allowed in general; they apply with superior force in the circumstances of Abraham. He was a selected minister in the plans of providence: ought he not to be proved for this distinction? He was to be the founder of a new and numerous nation, who would look to his example in the vicissitudes of their fortune: could it be too conspicuous and striking? he was to receive comprehensive and singular blessings: ought not his desert of them to be manifest? And of what moment in the estimate of them was any short contrast of previous affliction? His faith was accordingly brought to the test; his piety actuated and exalted, illustrated and recompenced. He was distressed; he was extricated. He performed, and he enjoyed the delightful consciousness of performing an heroic exertion of self-command. His conduct was crowned with instant benediction, with a testimony of approbation pronounced by God; and a promise of favour, accumulated favour, reaching out beyond himself



SERMON  
IX.

self to a multiplied posterity. It could not be therefore inconsistent with justice or goodness to impose an injunction, which thus amply designed utility, distinguished obedience, perfected excellence, and terminated in happiness.

Exculpating the justice or goodness of God in the questioned injunction, there are who find his wisdom impeachable. Is it not a contrariety to reason? Is it not a reversal of nature? Is it not an authority for a similar violation of life? In the first instance, consequently, misrule; in the second, inconsistency; and in the third, a precedent for barbarity?

The contrariety of it to a principle of reason, if by reason be meant the human faculty, may be acknowledged. But is every principle of human reason, or, which is the same, every conception of human fancy, an absolute canon of rectitude? May there not be conjunctures, in which advantages, undescried by human penetration, may determine an infinite being, who  
sees

sees individuals in all relations, and incidents in all tendencies, to deviate from the customary track of human procedure? On the discernment of such advantages, would it not be weakness to contravene or suppress them? And should he appoint the deviation, without disclosing in express terms the advantages determining it; what will exceptions to the existence or admission of them prove: not defect of propriety in the appointment, which would be defect of counsel in the author; but want of knowledge, with want of modesty, in the censor, or, presumption proportionate to fallibility?

2dly, But is not the preservation of children a law of nature, as such, a law of God; not therefore to be infringed without self-contradiction, without discredit on his immutability? And does then his immutability imply a fixed necessity of events, a fatal series of inviolable observances: or, permanency of being, unity of perfection, constancy of administration, a determinate procedure by ordinary rules in ordinary occurrences,

SERMON  
IX.

ences, but by extraordinary ones, where emergent occasions of sufficient importance require or advise interposition: in short, consistency proposing uniformly one grand end of prepollent good, and varying by circumstances the means of producing it? Such is, in precise conception, the immutability of God: and to take from Him this latitude of action, variable by circumstances, is to take from Him, in reality, the just exercise of his attributes. If he have not the will to suspend or control ordinary laws for extraordinary ends, where is his providence, his forecast, or his benignity? If he have not the power, where is his legislative command of nature, his ability of ever working a miracle, of interposing with any preternatural agency, however requisite, for any expedient, however desirable? And what is, in consequence, the value of his government to himself or his creatures; whilst he perceives benefit, which he cannot effect, and, derivable from the communication of it, felicity, which he cannot enjoy.

But

But was there not in the example a dis- SEPMON IX.  
 regard of life, encouraging or authorising  
 barbarity? This inference is surely un-  
 fair. Did the example, in design or in is-  
 sue, absolve or relax the general obligation  
 of tutelar care over the lives of descendants?  
 Did not indeed the issue of it teach a con-  
 trary lesson, by a prohibitory intervention at  
 the instant of destruction? I need not how-  
 ever insist on this circumstance. If God  
 have a right over life, and choose to exert  
 it; doth that exertion discharge, or trans-  
 fer without limitation, that right? Or will  
 it follow, that, having prescribed an act, in  
 a single instance; by a special revelation, for  
 a particular purpose of his providence, he  
 therefore permits it, in other instances, at  
 the discretion of other judgments, without  
 the authority of his mandate?

Idly; The delivery of this mandate permit  
 me now to suppose sufficiently reconciled  
 with wisdom, justice and goodness; in order  
 to make way for the next enquiry, whe-  
 ther the compliance with it be equally de-  
 sensible.



SERMON  
IX.

How, it hath been asked, could Abraham certainly know it to be the dictate of God? And, if known, how could he properly obey it?

1. The first question seems to be mockery. It asks in effect, how could God make himself known; how could he, who formed the understanding, act upon it; how could he, who imparted the faculty of communication, possess it; how could he, whose power is infinite, unexceptionably prove it; or how could he, whose intercourse Abraham had experienced, whose direction Abraham had repeatedly followed, continue that intercourse, and that direction? The Almighty had antecedently, not less than nine times, manifested himself to the patriarch; twice in a vision, twice by miracle, twice under some sensible appearance, and thrice in some form unexplained; had tried him with three prior commands, each gradually aggravated; one concerning the removal from Haran, which was in fact banishment from his country; a second, concerning the rite of circumcision,

cision, which was painful, and not without hazard; the third, concerning the exclusion of the bond-woman, which involved the rejection of a loved and dependent son. The grounds of obedience to these commands must have been conviction of their divine origin; the result of it was, protection. If he desired yet farther evidence of divine interposition; he had been favoured with it, not only in the attestation of the two kings, Pharaoh and Abimeleck, added to the visible execution of judgments on them and their house-hold; but in other instances. He had been called, addressed, discoursed, on one occasion, when the destruction of Sodom was proposed, for a considerable time, with particular familiarity. And could he, after all these notices, doubt or mistake, in the command respecting Isaac, the reality of a revelation from heaven?

2. Let us turn then from the Divinity of the command, to the other question, on the propriety of the compliance. The object of it was confessedly, at first sight, privation or exposure of life,

SERMON  
IX.

with an apparent breach of parental duty. And is privation or exposure of life, in all circumstances without exception, unlawful? If so, what are we to conceive of the sovereign who endangers, and the magistrate who exterminates it, or the minister who acts under the precept of either? On any compulsion of evident necessity, on any demand of social welfare, where private safety or public order requires the excision or hazard of a life, we readily submit humanity to prudence. In any assignable case, with infallible conviction, that death would remove even the suffering individual from extreme and irremediable misery, or to extreme and lasting happiness, we should, I believe, deem the stroke of violence not inexcusable. It is plain therefore, that destruction is then only unwarranted, when the end which induces it is inadequate, or the authority which prescribes it incompetent: neither of which could be supposed, when God was the director.

But

But the obvious obligation of parental duty is retorted. And is the obligation of obedience to God less indisputable, or less indispensable? We cannot surely be unapprised, that duties oblige with proportions and pre-eminences graduated on an ascending scale by different relations, and the different importance of their objects; that those which we owe to children, preservation included, are of secondary and inferior note to those which we immediately owe to ourselves; these to many social claims; these again to the rights of the community at large: and that where any of these duties incompatibly interfere, the less must give way to the greater. Or, not to insist on any preferable arrangement of these human duties, it cannot surely be doubted, that the whole system of them must hold a subordinate rank under those which belong to God; and that, where his will is clearly known, especially by an extraordinary revelation, compliance, whatever common ties may plead against it, must be innocent and necessary. The result of the

SERMON  
IX.



SERMON  
IX.

whole is, that on receiving a command, which grounded on the highest authority, which might have in view the highest advantage, and which could not ultimately terminate in calamity, Abraham, had he disobeyed, would have committed impiety, presumptively too, injury: he obeyed therefore with propriety.

I have now taken with me your attention through the distinguishing particulars of the sacred narrative; which describes the temptation of Abraham in the demanded offering of his son, the perplexities illustrating his submission, and the objections enforcing his vindication. From each may be deduced moral improvement.

By his submission, in the progress of it, we are taught, how far the reverence of God ought to influence; that self-denial is commendable, and the austereft degree of it practicable; that true faith will pursue inflexibly, what it hath determined resolutely; and that there is no beloved

Isaac,

Isaac, in whatever shape of pleasure or profit, possession or expectancy, which it should not, and will not, if required, deliver up, as a probationary sacrifice to the Divine Will. By his submission, in the concluding event of it, we are again taught, with an encouragement sufficient to make the most difficult duty easy; that whatever intricacies of affliction may happen, (and none can happen capable of offering half so much violence to Nature, as the necessity of destroying a darling and only child) our Creator, who sends or permits them, will not fail to sustain resolution, through the encounter of them, with some invisible succour; and to crown, at the consummation of them, victorious perseverance with some superior reward.

SERMON  
IX.

In the vindication of Abraham we read another lesson; that there is no relation, however simple, or example, however admirable, which captious, and perverted ingenuity may not embarrass with scruples, and disfigure with misrepresentations: but that

SERMON  
IX.

that they probably proceed in general from misconception ; from imperfect views, and superficial enquiries. Of this, therefore, our present subject, and of every other occurrence in the informations of revelation, let us think with a becoming regard both to the revealer and to ourselves. Where we are met by difficulties (as difficulties must be expected by finite beings in the counsels of an infinite one), let us candidly impute them to the immensity of his understanding, and the defectiveness of ours : where we discern satisfactory reasons to justify his conduct, with thankfulness let us accept them ; and, where we do not, with humility suppose them,

---

S E R M O N X.

---

Pf. xix.---12.

*Who can tell how oft he offendeth? O  
cleanse thou me from my secret faults.*

**T**HIS passage contains a reflection, SERMON  
and a wish of a good man, struck X.  
with a sense of his spiritual condition; a  
reflection on the many deviations from rec-  
titude, to which with all his circumspec-  
tion he is liable. "Who can tell how  
oft he offendeth:" with a consequent wish  
to have them prevented or pardoned, "O  
cleanse thou me from my secret faults."

By



SERMON  
X.

By secret faults, distinguished here, as may be seen in the next verse, from presumptuous ones, I would understand, not only mere sins of privacy, but commissions and omissions inadvertent and involuntary: the common lapses of human frailty. And in this view, not surely inadmissible, especially if considered with the former part of the text, the words lead to an obvious distinction of faults into casual and wilful ones; or, as they are frequently called, Sins of Infirmary, and Sins of Presumption: a distinction, which it may be of great importance both to our peace and to our piety, to fix a-right; that we may neither despond under the apprehension of guilt by aggravating errors into crimes, nor sin with a fatal security under the pretext of frailty, by softening crimes into errors.

My business shall be, therefore, at present, with sins of infirmity: which I will endeavour, in the ensuing discourse, to ascertain, by shewing, first, negatively, what should not be

be reputed such ; and in the next place, <sup>SERMON</sup>  
<sup>X.</sup> positively, what should.

And 1. An offence cannot find shelter in the subterfuge of infirmity, merely because committed with reluctance or regret ; which the daring sinner may be presumed, in some degree, to feel, especially in his early fallies. To sin without remorse, to act shamefully without shame, indicates the last stage of profligacy, a conscience seared, and all the sensibilities of nature closed, beyond hope, and almost beyond conception. But it is surely depravity too, to sin against remorse, to experience the starts of compunction, to perceive the calls and checks of shame ; yet disregard them. It is, therefore, a delusion of fancy possibly dangerous, to place under the protection, of infirmity, supposing a sufficient evidence, a bare concern on the commission of sin ; which can be in few cases excuse, and must be in many aggravation.

2. The

SERMON  
X.

2. The plea of infirmity cannot, in the next place, extend to sins repeated after resolutions of amendment; even if we suffer the sincerity of these resolutions to pass unquestioned. For if this were admitted, if resolution were privileged with merit to atone for improbity; it would be an easy composition for a discharge from the obligation of obedience. But resolution is, in fact, a relative and instrumental act of the mind, dependent for its estimation on performance; without which it is mockery, or at least an empty form, a preparation without progress, and an influence without use.

3. Nor, again, is allowable, under cases of infirmity, a crime proceeding from a crime, or criminal cause of our own admission; as when the will rashly yields itself up to an unlawful impulse, while a cool reflection or vigorous exertion might have prevented the incident. There are, who in a paroxysm of anger, outrage your person, injure your property, calumniate your

your character. Will you screen these self-made maniacs under the blamelessness of infirmity? All the extravagances of all the passions may be regarded in the same light; guilt adhering to the principle, the consequence cannot be innocent.

SERMON  
X.

4. The depravity or degeneracy of human nature is sometimes resorted to, but inadmissibly, as a refuge under the cover of infirmity. Our warped judgment and enfeebled powers, it has been said, render certain acts of sin excusable, by rendering them unavoidable. If this pretext excuse any sins, it must excuse all; it excludes indeed the very existence of sin: for what we cannot avoid, in that we cannot transgress. But the whole conceit, and its application are delusive. We cannot but be apprised that we have still left, amidst all the ruins of our primitive structure, discernment to distinguish good, and ability to pursue it, reason to temper passion, conscience to interpose against temptation: and it is apparent that God himself, whatever



SERMON

X.

ever may be the state of our powers, hath deemed them sufficient for every moral purpose, by enacting with solemn sanction moral laws for our observance. To sin, therefore, and rest the blame on Nature, is guile, not frailty; to forbear exertion, and plead impotence, is carelessness, not infirmity.

II. What may not be reputed sins of infirmity, hath now been considered: What are positively such, may be cast, I think, as far as reducible to definition, under the four following divisions, Ignorance, Inconsideration, Irresolution, and Prejudice.

I. From simplicity, from deficient capacity, from a capacity not possessing proper means or opportunities of tuition, it cannot be denied, that there may be real ignorance with respect to the law itself; and, as the law speaks often in general terms, not descending to minute and special directions, still more, with respect to the application of it. On the degrees and circumstances of obligation, the precise measure of temperance,

perance, for example, the portion of time <sup>SERMON</sup>  
 assignable for prayer, the proportion of in- <sup>X.</sup>  
 come assignable to alms; on the indirect but  
 necessary restrictions of indifferent actions,  
 on the nice limits of virtue, where improbity  
 consists not in principle, but in excess, it  
 may not be always easy to determine: there  
 is from the preceding causes room for mis-  
 takes, which charity will pity, not crimi-  
 nate. Indeed in all such cases of igno-  
 rance, which is involuntary, which is there-  
 fore not irreconcilable with an honest  
 heart, there may be infelicity, there cannot  
 be immorality.

2. To ignorance succeeds inconsidera-  
 tion: inconsideration from distemper or  
 misery, discomposure or weariness. The  
 querulousness of the sick, the anger of  
 the calumniated or insulted, and the pe-  
 tulance of the irritated man; or, with  
 the illustration of example, the expos-  
 tulatory complaints of the Psalmist un-  
 der disease or affliction, the passionate re-  
 tort of St. Paul on the High Priest under  
 a commanded blow, when he knew him  
 M not,

SERMON

X.

not, properly considered him not, *i. e.* forgot his dignity; and Job's burst of impatience into impiety, in the curse of his birth, under the continued provocation of his taunting visitants, who, that regards the human frame, the influences, the sensibility of its bodily organs, and the dependence of reason on their operation, will with rigour condemn.

Who again will with rigour condemn the failures in duty proceeding from surprise? A sudden delight, a sudden sorrow or terror, a sudden instigation, will sometimes bear away reason, before it can deliberate to prepare for resistance. The misgiving of David, with respect to the fidelity of God, in his supposition that he "should perish by the hand of Saul," the incredulity of Zacharias demanding from the Angel a confirmation of his message, and the momentary apostacy of St. Peter, seem to be examples of this class; in which the suddenness of the occurrence prevents precaution against it, in which is hardly conceivable any moral responsibility, as there is hardly any free agency.

agency. We may advance yet farther, beyond surprise to inadvertency; of which a certain species or a certain degree is alike excusable. The wanderings of a lively imagination, or the languors of a dull one in prayer, the thoughtless indulgence of forbidden amusements, forgetful slips of obloquy in conversation austerity may consign to guilt, but tenderness will pity as natural lapses of human imperfection.

SERMON  
X.

3. From inconsideration let us now turn to irresolution, the third class of my arrangement. Here again we find many pardonable transgressions or omissions of duty. Officious or timorous falsehoods, the undistinguishing practice of fashionable politeness, which with real hypocrisy receives and addresses friends and foes with the same air of esteem, encroachments on the strict law of temperance, spring from this source, and are scarcely avoidable. Whilst we converse in the world, we cannot stand aloof from our fellow-members. We must mix with them for knowledge



SERMON

X.



or chearfulness : it is not possible, nor indeed consistent with benevolence, to be utterly indifferent to their praise or blame : and, as there must be somewhere some ability of contributing to our gain or gratification, we cannot live amongst them without some pursuit. In this situation we must endeavour to please them, that they may serve or please us. The consequence will be, compliance with their customs, and conformity to their manners. Such compliance, such conformity may be faulty ; yet without it, an imputation of moroseness would be fixed upon us injurious probably to interest, or of singularity derogatory from reputation. Here therefore let observation with piously these sacrifices to complaisance less frequent, yet judge them tenderly.

4. We have yet remaining for survey one fruitful nursery of innocent errors in prejudice. The counsel of parents, the tuition of teachers, the communications of friends, the documents of books, the informations

or

or examples of acquaintance, or still more casual incidents, infuse often into the mind prepossessions, which settle into rules of judgment or action ; and which the ambiguity of words, from the imperfection of language, contributes at once to support and extenuate. They are generally of deep hold, and extensive influence. By them every position or character is tried ; and, through the medium of them, most commonly magnified and illustrated, or diminished and discoloured. Truth daily feels their power ; and duty yields to their encroachment. They are often absurd, sometimes mischievous. Yet, who will say, that they are all absolutely sins ? They do, or may, proceed from an erroneous conscience ; which, however accountable for its conduct, who will pronounce absolutely sinful ? Conscience is our sole director, divinely appointed so, in the province of self-government. And is it imaginable, that we can, without negligence in research, provoke the displeasure of God, either by having this director misinformed,

SERMON  
X.

SERMON  
X.

or, however it may be informed, by following its dictates? Prejudice, therefore, if certainly and truly produced in its origin, or actuated in its movements by conscience, must, even supposing it wrong in ground, or in exercise, be admitted to a place in the venial accounts of human fallibility.

Before I quit this article of prejudice, I would offer one observation: which is, that, considering the extent, and force, and confidence of prejudice, the artful plausibilities employed to insinuate its conceits, and the difficulty often of deciding on the rectitude of them, the object of enquiry, in recommended or controverted points of belief, or practice, should be, with simple understandings at least, not so much what is true or false, as what is good, important, useful, benevolent; or, in other words, a real improvement of the individual, or a real advantage to society.

You

You have now heard, under the most SERMON  
X. natural distribution occurring to me, a fair report of the transgressions referred or referable to infirmity. I have collected and defined them with the more particularity, not only to ease the anxieties of a scrupulous piety, but because infirmity is the known encouragement, or occasional subterfuge at least, even of inexcusable vice: and I have expressed them under their common appellation, in compliance with a received form of speech. Yet after all I cannot help observing, that there is at best an impropriety of language in this received appellation of "sins of infirmity." If they be effects resulting from necessity, they cannot be culpable; if from will, they cannot be innocent; or in short, if infirmities, they are not sins; if sins, they are not infirmities. To the best morality of frail mortals an appendage of imperfection will adhere; and God will unquestionably cast a favourable eye on the failures of the good with an acceptance of their sincere, though not sinless obedience. But to conceive, that we can be



SERMON  
X.

virtuous without endeavouring against guilt,  
or guilty without being liable to punishment, is a self-deceit, enervating his commands, or defying his justice.

May this consideration alarm the conscious heart to cry out with the Psalmist, "who can tell how oft he offendeth, O cleanse thou me from my secret faults;" from those which memory can recal, and those which it hath not recorded: O lessen the number and mitigate the obnoxiousness of them; supply my defects, I implore thy succour; pardon my errors, I rely upon thy mercy through the mediation of my Saviour Jesus Christ, &c.

S E R-

---



---

## S E R M O N    X I.

---

John xiii.---34.

*A New Commandment I give unto you, that  
ye love one another ; as I have loved you,  
that ye also love one another.*

**I**N contemplating the divine perfections, SERMON  
XI.  
we are most impressed with that, which  
holds out the friend in the universal parent ;  
our Almighty Creator's benevolence, or  
tender care of our happiness. And among  
the many palpable proofs of this benevo-  
lence, or at least among the temporal effects  
of it, there is not one, which a reflecting  
observer remarks with more admiration, or  
a devout

SERMON a devout one with more gratitude, than his

XI.

gracious attention to raise and cultivate a similar disposition in us : an attention internally manifest in the very constitution of our frame, in that aversion to solitude, that attachment of kind, those particular amities and charities, which tie our connexions, soften our tempers, exert and combine our powers, extend and improve our pleasures, in the counsels of reason, which is daily urging benefits by anticipating wants, and in the sollicitations of that powerful, that imbosomed intercessor for misery, pity. Yet farther too, lest these several principles should prove languid or desultory, and insufficient in the result for the demands of social life : lest the inclination to union should be hindered or narrowed in use by accidental and fanciful distinctions ; lest reason should be an oracle unconsulted, or, as it is often found in the multitude, an unequal match for passion ; lest pity should be enfeebled or perverted, enfeebled by selfishness or dissipation, perverted by sensuality or prejudice ; He has added

ded to the impresses and impulses of nature a new force in the commands of religion, repeatedly inculcating in his revealed word both benevolence and beneficence; not only that external courtesy which avoids offence, not only that negative good-will, which abstains from injury, but cordial affection forwardly shewing itself in actual services.

SERMON  
XI.

To this generous purpose, to render each man a friend to each, to open in every bosom a soft, overflowing source of general kindness, emphatically speaks our Saviour in the text, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another:" a lesson this, which I will not pronounce the strictest and most authoritative of the kind, for he is often seriously importunate on the same article of duty; but which is certainly discriminated by some circumstances, that give it an heightened pathos and force. The preparatory remark, for instance, at the beginning of the chapter where it occurs, "Having loved  
his



SERMON

XI.

his own which were in the world, he loved them to the end;" the gentle and tender mode of address with which it is introduced, " Little children, yet a little while I am with you;" the reason, on which it is grounded, as meant to form a lustre of character, a lineament of distinction, a criterion of discipleship, " By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples;" and particularly the season, in which it was uttered, just at the close of his life, just before his passion, as a final memento, as a sort of supreme bequest, when he was about to exhibit in his last most comprehensive act of most consummate benevolence on the Cross an illustrious comment upon it, tend altogether to project and colour the precept with peculiar solemnity; to impress the obligation, and, I would hope likewise, inspire the observance of it, with peculiar effect.

1. The question is, on what account doth our Lord call this injunction of mutual kindness, which is a dictate of nature, which  
he

he had before too frequently inculcated, SERMON  
XI.  
a new commandment. Why, if the expression imply any thing more than a fresh and special revival of the injunction at that period, it may be understood to import that the doctrine of charity, among other duties, had received from the improved morality of his gospel, some eminent alteration. And, in truth, new it was with respect to the degree, the comprehension, and the foundation, of it.

The connection established amongst us by mere nature, is the community of a species, the kindness dictated by the mere ethics of reason, an indefinite regard to the fellows of a species: but christianity draws us yet more closely together by a spiritual band; on the ground of redemption, by equality of mercy, through a general title to a joint inheritance, it dignifies man with special importance, and animates the propensity towards each other with increased ardour. The species is now endeared into a peculiar people, humanity advanced to consanguinity,

SERMON  
XI.

nity, and good will, impassioned, if I may so speak, into tenderness : that is, we are not only to favour each other as men, but to embrace and cherish each other as brethren, as elect brethren, and even, according to the memorable passage of St. Paul, with that quick, energetic yearning of instinctive sensibility, which we term  
\* *εγγενή* natural affection.

2. The singularity of this Christian love next observable is, its comprehension. The rule of charity with the Jew was local and respective. With blind and arrogant bigotry, under the prepossessions of his national separation, which could not be effected without the excision of his surrounding enemies, or secured without restraints on his intercourse, neither effected nor secured therefore without some flattering appearances of marked attention to himself, he at length conceived of the Deity as his political ruler only, and of the duties imposed by the Deity, as mere municipal statutes. Interpreting accordingly by these senti-

\* Τα φιλὰ ἀδελφία πρὸς ἀλλήλους φιλότητες. Rom. xii. 10.

ments of self-exaltation, the brother and SERMON  
XI. neighbour of his law to design, not the partaker of his nature, but the member of his community; he considered humanity as circumscribed within a pale, and the offices of it as proprietary claims of his own privileged tribe or race. An historian of high authority, remarks his, "misericordia in promptu", ready commiseration to his compeers, and, his "hostile odium", hostile aversion towards all others \*. Nay, he carried this exclusive idea so far, that, if the report of a foreign satyrift may be credited, he would not shew a traveller either a road for his direction, or a spring for his refreshment, if not an observer of the same ritual with himself †.

Be this however as it may be fancied, a casual incident perhaps exaggerated into a national reproach; yet both with the Jew and with the Heathen, philanthropy had indisputably a narrow reach allowed it in its articles of obligation. Their disdainful and cruel treatment of those who

\* Tacitus. † "Eadem nisi Sacra colenti."—Juv.

performed



SERMON  
XI.

performed the depressed, but necessary toils of servitude, *i. e.* according to the best computations in the best described countries, above two thirds of the inhabitants, is well known. Their treatment of offences had the same austere and haughty cast; the one encouraging the resentment of them as a proof of magnanimity, the other permitting the punishment of them with a rigorous retaliation: and both, even the renowned for virtue, even the doctors of morality, among both, having in general no perceptible notion of forbearance beyond the positive law of justice, of favour beyond the debts of gratitude, of affection beyond the partialities of friendship.

The rule of charity with the Jew was local and respective, confined to the members of his community: both with the Jew and with the Heathen it had a narrow reach in its articles of obligation, not subduing resentment, not extending beyond mere justice, gratitude, or accidental, perhaps capricious, friendship: and the principle

ciple of it was not less defective ; the na- <sup>SERMON</sup>  
 tural relation between man and man, the <sup>XI.</sup>   
 good of society, or a temporary penalty.

But with us it grounds on an eternal recompence, in the grateful imitation of a Redeemer, who quitted Heaven to serve us, who laid down his life to save us ; “ As I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” Well, therefore, might our master characterise by the attribute of novelty his doctrine of love, having given it a perfection which it had not before, by throwing it open, from national and personal restrictions, to the whole race of mankind, by adding to it, besides an intensification of degree, two exalted branches, forgiveness of injuries, with the love of enemies ; and by strengthening it with a new principle of superior cogency, the love of himself.

The next, the most important question suggested by the text is, How it may be reduced to practice ? And a short, decisive answer is at hand ; by every social benefit, issuing from a right principle, without  
 N which

SERMON

XI.

which it is neither merit nor morality, to a good end, without which it is neither obligation nor discretion; by every honest service, which want claims, and every innocent satisfaction, which may promote happiness.

From the meaning I would now transfer your attention to the excellency of the precept.

And first, to the simplicity of it. All the precepts of Christ are marked with this character; they are addressed to the conscience through the heart: and an upright heart is the best expositor in the application of them. It would have been easy to have made them more complex; and if more complex, at the same time more voluminous, by branching them with divisions, interspersing them with illustrations, and hedging them with exceptions. But what then would have been the result? An addition to their bulk, possibly to their curiosity, not to their use; a provision in the composition of them, not of an accessible and applicable directory for common concerns, and common persons, but  
of

of a superb pandect of moral law for a library; or a recondite treasure of science for a few scholars, whom they might have furnished with opportunities of palming false reports upon the easy, confidence of ill-informed dependents. In short, on this supposition of multiplicity, the extent of which no conception can bound, who could have found leisure to study them, or memory to retain them? Or, who, on any particular exigent, even if he could have spared the industry, would have possessed the patience to pick out from the ample mass the clauses and comments particularly respecting it? Might not practice therefore have been lost in explication, and determined neglect have sprung from discouraged research?

On contrast, in counterbalance to these obvious inconveniences, what would have been the benefit? Not the great desideratum of a complete and effectual safeguard against evasion or misapprehension. Multiply phrase upon phrase, and example upon example; you render



SERMON  
XI.

a duty more restrained perhaps by marking its limits, not more forcible : and the same inattention that neglects, the same weakness that misunderstands, the same perverseness that misinterprets, the same craft that perplexes, the same depravity that violates, a short, general precept, would act probably with the same effect on all the explanations of it. The procedure of our Saviour was therefore the procedure of wisdom. Instead of affecting the refined speculatist, the sagacious sophist, the profound casuist ; he rather displayed the popular law-giver, the practical and rational teacher. Instead of expanding his doctrine in details, or imping it by discussions, he chose rather to give it in a compressed and simple form to be evolved and applied by his followers. This in general. The text proves it in particular : in which he exhorts us to love one another on the model of his example. We all know what the term “ love ” implies ; nor less, how generously, how amply, how impartially he “ loved us : ” the precept therefore expounds and adjusts itself. 2. By

2. By simplicity you perceive me to SERMON  
 understand brevity and perspicuity. But XI.  
 what is brevity without pregnant sense,  
 or perspicuity without importance? Com-  
 prehensive use therefore forms the next  
 distinction of the text. The sentiment,  
 which it enjoins, is universal beneficence in  
 the root; comprehending not only the ab-  
 stinence from wrong, which constitutes jus-  
 tice; and the actual assistance, which con-  
 stitutes charity; but the gentle and friendly  
 demeanour, promotive of peace. Oh! that  
 it were therefore regarded and cherished in  
 its full extent! It would act with a much  
 needed counterforce against self-love, stretch  
 her thoughts beyond her own little circum-  
 ference, and defeat and correct the envies,  
 the arrogances, the rapacities, the circum-  
 ventive designs, and disingenuous pretences,  
 in her train. It would make knowledge  
 the guide, not the scorner, of imbecillity;  
 power the patron of worth; and affluence,  
 as designed, the almoner of providence to

SERMON  
XI.

want. It would check that pragmatistical spirit, which is so vexatiously busy in familiar intercourse with tales, animadversions, surmises; and, in confederacy with this, another kindred disturber, less censured, not less mischievous, the spirit of party; which daily outrages decency with so much virulence in tearing characters, and encouraging animosities.

The utility of the precept reaches yet farther, not only to the performance of the relative duties, which social weal indispensably requires, and indeed augments, yet social law imperfectly enforces; but to the measure and manner of it, which this imperfect enforcement leaves still more widely incapable of regulation. There is a sublime and a beautiful, a greatness beyond rule, and a delicacy beyond exactness, in action, as in composition: and there is sometimes a rigour, a niggardliness even in the discharge of obligations. He, who will not omit a duty, or deny a gratification, will yet appreciate it with every possible abatement,

or

or apportion it by grains and scruples; he will make the extremes and qualifications of command his study, will perform or bestow just what prescriptive or prudential compliance extorts; and that too just when asked, perhaps with an ungracious air of superiority that insults, or apathy that disgusts.

SERMON  
XI.

Against these blemishes and littlenesses of conduct the text furnishes a preservative. As it is intended to operate on sentiment, and principle the heart; it will throw into the performances of its obedient disciple an honesty and a zeal, which are the best guides and guards of propriety. Instead of waiting for incitements, he will seek occasions to impart happiness? Instead of defining accurately the bounds of practice, which is but an artificial cover for the inclination to neglect, he will interpret as liberally, to act as beneficially, as possible; instead of scattering benefits, he will dispense them with distinguishing and feeling respect to the very jealousies of distress: in matters of co-operation he will take to himself the greatest por-



SERMON  
XI.

tion, in matters of distributive and interfering interest, the least ; in questions of precedence will be forward, but to condescend rather than presume ; in alms or gifts provident, but to contribute doubly, that he may contribute surely ; and in general, with an endeavour to spare the blush, whilst he confers the favour. In short, with the doctrine of Christ in his eye, as he cannot reject a call of real necessity, without rejecting a call of real affection, nor excite pain without suffering it ; ability will be the standard of his services, inoffensiveness the concomitant.

3. The utility of the text is sufficiently manifest ; permit me to add one closing remark on its persuasiveness. We are required by our Saviour to “love one another,” on the foundation, and after the similitude of his “love to us.” Memorable indeed is this love to us ; the whole plan of redemption a miracle of it : his condescending birth, his saving lessons, his beneficent life, his afflicting death, all the same miracle in progression.

gression. Can fancy lay before admiration SERMON  
an exemplar of benevolence more exalted: XI.   
can gratitude hear a motive to imitation  
more forcible? May its force be felt and  
practically demonstrated, grant gracious  
God, through, &c.

---



---

## S E R M O N XII.

---

PSALM xxii.—7, 8.

*All they that see me, laugh me to scorn:  
they shoot out the lip, they shake the head,  
He trusted on the Lord, that he would  
deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing  
he delighted in him.*

SERMON  
XII.

**T**H E Psalm, from which I have extracted this text, is a speaking picture of perplexed piety under the pressures of affliction. It exhibits a view of a forlorn sufferer indulging his emotions, expostulating with vivacity, imploring with reverence, expecting with confidence. In the anguish of his miseries, embittered by a persuasion, that he had not deserved them,

them, the inspired penman, interpreting a delay of redress as a denial of protection, opens his melancholy theme with an humble remonstrance against the severity of the divine procedure, introduced by an anxious question concerning the ground of it.

SERMON  
XII.

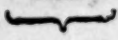
He admires, that he should find an enemy, where he might promise himself a friend; that the kind author of his being should discard a son, that the distinguished guardian of his nation should desert a subject. An enquiry into the cause of his condition is, with obvious propriety, succeeded by a detail of its circumstances. Much he dreads, more he feels, from a combination of weakness with wickedness, from contempt founded on misconception, from malice armed with power, from calamity aggravated by reproach, and from ignominy exasperated by injury. A recollection of past mercies, however, inspires an animated expectation of future ones. Hence, with a succession of movements frequently observable in the sentiments of distress,

after



SERMON  
XII. after an earnest petition for deliverance, exulting triumphantly in the anticipation of it, he varies his strain of address from complaint to praise : fear subsides in trust, discontent in gratitude ; he proclaims his glad sense of obligations, he calls upon all the votaries of religion to join in effusion of acknowledgments. The task, which he recommends to them, he vows to perform with zealous assiduity himself ; and concludes with observing the fruits, which would spring from such a memorable testimony of paternal regard, the awakened admiration of mankind in general, the devout service of an elect race in particular ; the consolation of some, the conversion of others, an improvement of faith in many, and a common celebration of Providence in all.

Such are, in free interpretation, the contents of the Psalm. Who was the author of it, is a point of enquiry more curious than useful. Common opinion, grounded

grounded on its title \*, and supported SERMON  
XII.  
by its subject, adjudges it to David :   
if rightly, as it contains some particulars,  
which could not be the literal transcript of  
his experience, or the natural result of his  
reflection, there appearing in the complaint  
a description of sufferings which have no  
historical foundation in his persecutions,  
and in the exultation a prediction of effects  
which seem to have no eventual connexion  
with his re-establishment ; to vindicate  
these from the charge of impropriety, it  
will be necessary to suppose, that they are  
either figuratively amplified, if they are to  
be considered in a direct view only, or myf-  
tically allusive with a secondary one ; that  
they are traits of poetry, heightened by the  
colouring of an Oriental fancy, or hints of

\* The titles of the Psalms are of little weight ; they  
are generally allowed to come from a later hand (from a  
hand subsequent to the age of David), and some of them  
are injudiciously placed. Part of the title of the Psalm  
before us is, “ for the Morning Hind”—*The Morning  
Hind*, was probably a well-known song, which gave  
name to a particular tune, if not instrument ; not unlikely  
of the melancholy kind, as possibly it might describe a  
poor Hind pursued by hunters.

prophecy,

SERMON  
XII.

prophecy, dictated by the suggestion of inspired knowledge, with a reference to the events of the Christian Era, to the incidents which accompanied the Passion, and to the consequences which succeeded the resurrection.

Having premised a general view of the composition, with a remark on its author, I proceed to the consideration of that part, which I have selected for my text. It will be found in the front of the description, which the Psalmist has drawn of his complicated distresses. In obvious and literal construction the whole passage may stand thus: "All, who see me, deride or gibe at me; they put out, or open widely the lip; they shake the head: devolve, cast, or rest on, *i. e.* trust in Jehovah, He will release him, He will rescue, or secure him, since, or, if He willeth, delighteth in, or is well affected towards him." That is, those who see me, misled by the survey of my misery into a misinterpretation of its origin, insult me  
with

with all the petty indignities of sarcasm, which indignation, or contempt, can devise; as persecuted from Society they regard me with visible scorn; as the supposed object of divine vengeance, with consternation, or derision: they say (perhaps amongst them were pitying friends) one to another, let him confide in the justice of God, who will determine his fate by his desert if he merit favour, he may depend upon protection, if he enjoy approbation, he will receive an evidence of it.

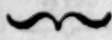
But the Psalm is characteristically stamped with a prophetic purport; the citation of it upon the Cross, the literal coincidence of several expressions, with the occurrences of the crucifixion, and the taunting application of the text in particular to the Divine Sufferer, all concurring to place it amongst the credentials of Christianity. In this relation, as is in general found in the Hebrew language, whether from its simple genius as an early product of antiquity, or from its sacred office, as the destined vehicle of prophecy, the inflexions of the

verbs



SERMON  
XII.

verbs are too few in number, and too variously accommodated in use, to be definitely explicable by one uniform rule of construction; the same tenses denoting different modifications of time, the same moods expressing different intentions and affections of mind. The common exposition of the verses seems most significantly adapted to the scope of their aim, whilst it is equally authorised by the ambiguity of their terms. I mean the following. "All, who see me, laugh me to scorn, or treat me with derision, they shoot out, or pour forth from the lip; they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord, or he relied on Jehovah, that He would deliver him, or provide for his escape, let him deliver him, or set him at liberty, seeing he delighted, or if he delight in him:" That is, My sufferings are inflamed with cruel aggravations, from prejudice by scoffs, from malice by contumelies; my hostile confederates ridicule even my trust in God: now, say they, as they behold me, or speak of me, now is his proper time to verify his  
vaunts;

vaunts; if he possess the favour of the <sup>SERMON</sup> Almighty, let the Almighty manifest it by <sup>XII</sup>  instant and seasonable interposition to snatch him from misery. A picture, this, in which the description of the text stands pre-eminent. It exhibits towards a forlorn and undeserving sufferer indications of malice, which must have particularly wounded his spirit, in scoffs intended to exasperate the cruelty of persecution by the insult of contumely.

The latter clause of the passage, admits two interpretations; one provocative, in the imperative mood, implying a challenge, "Let him deliver him, seeing, or, if he delighted in him;" the other affirmative, in the future tense implying a declaration, "He will deliver him, seeing, or, if he delighted in him." But however the expression of the text may be construed, the taunt expressed is plain, nor less remarkable; containing, in comprehensive consideration, for I would take it at large from its reference to Christ, a direct or covert position, that

O

the

SERMON  
XII.

the Deity must immediately rescue a dependent sufferer from affliction : and that if he do not, he certainly, by with-holding his relief, demonstrates, that he has withdrawn his affection : or, to collect the import of the insinuation into a general principle, that affliction is an absolute proof of divine anger ; the permission of it a suspension, the continuance of it an alienation, of divine favour.

A strange opinion ! yet not without its prevalence, among the rude and superstitious often ; sometimes too, perhaps, among those of higher estimation. Let us therefore bring it to a scrutiny.

I. It is obvious on the first view of it to pronounce, that it militates at once against humility, piety, and charity : against humility, as an intrusion into counsels, and a decision upon designs, which cannot be the objects of human knowledge ; against piety, as directing the scourge of an equal governor with partiality ; against charity,

charity, as marking out particular individuals for particular criminals; for whom but criminals can God exclude from his favour? But the tendency and effects of such a doctrine aggravate its immediate implication. For, if excluded from the favour of God, they cannot probably or properly expect to retain the benevolence of man.

SERMON  
XII.

II. But let us examine the opinion yet more directly.

From a large portion of human evils deliverance is impossible: they have their rise from predisposing causes removed from the investigation of our superficial discernment, in the regular processes of material nature; which cannot be stopped or altered, and the effects of which cannot therefore be obviated or diverted, without an incessant violation of its pre-established laws. Excluding then such evils, or at least this idea of them, from consideration, as their intractability, or necessity, will, in just thinking,



SERMON  
XII.

ing, exclude them from blame, let us en-  
quire:

IIIIdly. Whether there are not possible uses, which affliction may minister; great, moral uses, from which may result preponderating benefit, or, as it is usually termed, prepollent good. If there be, the permission, and of course the continuance of it in the economy of Providence needs no other vindication. Let us then look a little into the condition of man. May he not want calls to enforce his recollection, trials to ascertain his sincerity, correctives to reform his manners, and warnings to impress on his mind futurity? If so, and if his sufferings may answer these purposes, the inconvenience is unquestionably outweighed by the utility of them.

i. Let us see then, first, whether it may not be sometimes particularly expedient to rouse him to recollection.

Let

Let us suppose him accumulatively gifted with worldly distinctions, dignified by station, embosomed in affluence, surrounded with scenes of finished elegance, encircled with ministers submissive to his nod, and hardly able to imagine a solace beyond his possession, or a wish beyond his accomplishment. Yet amidst all these materials of pleasure, an instance not fictitious, an instance in parts and proportions very common, he knows not how to extract it. He droops, he languishes. He wants nothing, and he enjoys nothing. Familiarity tires his eye, repeated gratification blunts his feelings; and he stagnates in satiety, or cankers in discontent. He recurs to refinements perhaps, and they affect but by their novelty: he hunts after amusements perhaps, and he finds dissatisfaction: he schemes again and again to enliven his sensations; and he relapses into insipidity. What now can bring this spiritless, listless nursling of false delicacy to a sense of happiness? What, but an experience of its contrary? Let the cold hand of adversity

O 3

touch

SERMON  
XII.

touch him, he will awake; pinch him with necessity, he will bethink himself of what he possessed; impair his health, he will give that blessing its right value; detach him from elegance, he will perceive the sweets and the uses which it might have been made to produce. In a word, to estimate aright the good of life, which is merely comparative, a forced contrast by change is often expedient; and, to learn what is enjoyed, an experimental conviction of what is escaped.

But this advantage of affliction may be thought insignificant, and temporal rather than moral; the concern besides of a confined few. Another more important follows. Let us suppose a person in the noviciate, or in any stage of life immersed, or immersing himself, with rash levity, in fashionable dissipation. Occupied by frivolous ambitions, lured from one fantastic illusion to another, tender to the laugh, and ductile to the lead of dissolute associates, he presses to every standard of pleasure, he

runs

runs the giddy rounds of frolic and revelry, SERMON  
XII.  
is deaf to admonition, neglects every virtuous and valuable improvement; his morals perchance not quite depraved, but corrupting, his principles not quite eradicated, but loosening, his fortune not quite ruined, but mouldering. Is not the state of this advancing adventurer in irregularity perilous and pitiable, the surface of a pit-fall, or the edge of a precipice? And what can save him? What so soon as the arrest of a timely affliction? Let his gaiety be eclipsed, let him pass from indulging to induring, from sparkling to agonizing; let him be laid on a sick bed, no improbable effect of dissipation, he is unavoidably reduced to self-converse. Here, in solitary confinement, under the suspension of his functions, as he tosses from side to side; amidst sleeplessness, languor, self-denial, and solitude, appetites no longer in play with instigation, spirits no longer buoyant with amusement; he must find intervals to reflect, what may be the issue of his disease, what his preparation for it; and, under the impression of



SERMON  
XII.

this idea, the spectre of death in his eye, what is the actual worth, what the actual gain of those pleasures, which, with a wanton abuse of health, he solicited or courted. They are irrevocably past; they are by consequence flashy and fugitive: they succour him with no relief when he wants it, they are by consequence insignificant and useless: they yield him no reflex satisfaction on review, they are by consequence criminal or trifling. On religion, virtue, conscience, from which he has estranged himself, not on honour, decency, example, their fashionable substitutes, he now perceives the propriety of reposing dependence: they would remain with him, they would speak peace, without their consolations he is wretched.

In this serious train of sentiment, one observation will probably strike him; of some moment towards improving his morality, of great moment in his commerce with the world: and that is his real importance in society, his slight estimation even with his favourite

favourite companions. Such connexions SERMON  
XII. are not formed, or not accompanied, by probity; so that he will no sooner find himself removed from their sight, than from their attention. Mere insects of sunshine, they fly from the shades of misfortune, or the glooms of the sick-chamber. Their light and loose thoughts, insusceptible of sympathy, are blown away with some springing gale of novel temptation; and he learns, with pain perhaps, but with hopeful effect, that they valued him only, as he filled up some vacancy in their parties, or some ministry in their amusements. Here then is manifestly a pregnant benefit, by which affliction compensates itself, in snatching an improvident voluptuary from disorder, in holding up a mirrour, that shews him to himself; and enforces on his contemplation his actions in conjunction with his obligations, his aims in contrast with his interests.

2. But let us turn the view of man to another point. May he not want trials  
to

SERMON  
XII.

to ascertain his sincerity : I mean the sincerity of his attachment to duty ? It is presumable from reason, it is known from revelation, that we are agents in training, and candidates on probation, for a reward of immortal happiness in a future existence. The dispenser of this reward is God. And is it not agreeable to all the rules of moral government, that he should determine the qualifications of the pretenders to it by some antecedent proof ? To confer it without proof, is to relinquish his government ; to confer it without desert, is to counteract his wisdom ; to confer it against desert, or on demerit, is to forget his justice. But how is this proof to take place, except by what may influence and change the disposition ; an influence on conditions, and a change of situations ; or, in other words, by vicissitudes of fortune. Whilst the way of obedience is easy, whilst it produceth no intricacies to perplex, and no asperities to annoy ; mere human motives may engage continuance in it. But with the sufferer lies the effort. If he can tread his rugged path

path without weariness, if he can encounter difficulties without dismay, and sustain them without despondency; if, on finding his projects traversed, his hopes frustrated, his abundance curtailed, or his name calumniated, he can refrain from the too common intemperances of querulous petulance, profane distrust, and malignant envy, much more from wicked or base resources to redeem and disembarraß his condition; if, in short, in all his circumstances, he can persist to discharge all his duties; he hath a sure indication, that his religion stands on its right base, the love of God implied in a true filial reverence of his commands. And the gain finally crowning such trial, or even the inward triumph of joy, from the present self-applause of such consciousness, what external pain can comparatively proportion, what earthly inconvenience can supersede or counterbalance?

3. But man, besides trials to ascertain his sincerity, may require also correctives



SERMON to reform his manners. Temptation is  
XII.

busy, he is frail ; many indiscretions he at  
best commits, not without some guilt :  
and faint is his idea of misery menacing in  
prospect ; its remoteness diminishing its  
certainty, or its distinctness softning its  
terror, In these circumstances, with pre-  
sent impunity, or, which is the same, in  
an interrupted security, without the occa-  
sional intervention of some adverse incident  
to rouse his faculties, and remind him of  
an invisible power, is it not a probable  
conclusion, under the warrant of daily ob-  
servation, that he will grow insensible of  
danger, relax by degrees his internal go-  
vernment, hazard perpetual delays in the  
expiatory oblation of repentance for his  
faults, and suffer levity to predominate in  
his disposition, should depravity not lay  
waste his conscience. If mere security,  
thus dangerous, require occasional inter-  
ruption, let us consider for a moment the  
tendency of high prosperity. It fosters  
many vices in its train : it is the parent of  
presumption, The fortunate, when they  
survey

survey their successes, are apt to regard SERMON  
XII. them as the product of their wisdom, or the recompence of their merit; or, at most as the result of secondary and worldly causes, co-operating with the one or the other; the elevated, when they survey their advancement, will some times lift up their little vanity, till it break out in indecent vaunt or insult: the abundant, when they survey their possessions, will swell with self-sufficiency, as if their own industry, without the arrangements of superior counsel acquired them; or with self-reliance, as if their own care, without the protection of superior guardianship, could secure them.

Ingratitude is another vice of the prosperous. The munificence of their supreme benefactor hath often the singular influence of impairing their sense, or their acknowledgment of obligation: their affection is alienated from him by those distinctions, which ought to attach and confirm it: they are seduced into wickedness by those  
means

SERMON  
XII.

means of gratification, which are the proper incentives to piety : and in the flush of felicity, while they enjoy the gifts, they disregard the donor. Perhaps too, instead of consecrating the gifts to utility, they pervert them with dishonour, to deck ostentation, to inflame passion, or pamper sensuality. Here, therefore, is surely wanted a corrective, which can be no other than affliction. Humiliate these secure or prosperous transgressors, impoverish them, wring them with sorrow ; it is natural to suppose, that they will discern their errors, that a reverse of their fortune will be followed by a correspondent reversal of their sentiments ; that they will acknowledge divine power, when they have felt its agency ; revere divine justice, when they have been the subjects of its visitation ; regret and amend their misconduct, when they have incurred its consequences.

4. But I hasten to my last view of affliction ; as destined, or applicable, to impress on the mind of man required warnings of futurity,

futurity: futurity, an awful idea! which <sup>SERMON</sup> must, if it can excite his recollection, en- <sup>XII.</sup>  gage his solicitude; and more particularly so, in a cheerless period, when life darkens its aspect, and calamity overwhelms or distracts enjoyment. In the midst of health and plenty, when all is gay without, and sound within, when no cross baffles pursuit, and no evil molests tranquillity, the world presents a form powerfully attractive, with charms and with promises, which allure hope, and too frequently appropriate it; which inflame wishes, and too frequently terminate them. But we are designed, by the great arbiter of destiny, for a sublimer state: in order therefore to deaden the admiration of present satisfactions, it is necessary to embitter them; in order to elevate the thoughts towards heaven, it is necessary to wean them from earth. For these purposes affliction is obviously the suitable instrument. By striking experimentally on the conviction of the sufferer, the instability of his valued advantages,  
and



SERMON  
XII.

and his insufficiency to his own happiness, it will, it must turn his view, amidst fluctuation, to a point of rest, amidst disquietude to comfort, amidst infirmity to perfection.

And the more he contemplates affliction, the more he will be assured of a final retribution. For he will have the pain of remarking, that it reaches even the virtuous; that even the votaries of God, who are zealous in his service, labour sometimes under miseries, which enter not into the lot of many, known to act with an entire disregard of duty. In this startling intricacy, if he cannot solve, he will not cavil. Even to them may be perhaps requisite or expedient a trial, a corrective, a warning; or if not, their case furnishes at least an evidence of a judicial process after death. Since a wrong so flagrant cannot be left undressed by an impartial and holy governor; whose character it is to adjust all inequalities, and requite all deserts. It is

is accordingly a fair inference; that a glorified state will succeed their depressed one, that their sorrows will terminate in joys, and that, as their perseverance here, will be their reward hereafter. XII.

Such are the moral uses of affliction, sufficient to answer and refute the insinuation of the text. May the consideration of them have due course, and due efficacy to vindicate providence, to tranquillise, to sanctify, and to secure that grand object, to which tends their direction, and to which should tend our principal pursuit, our supreme good in an eternal world, through Jesus Christ, &c.

---

## S E R M O N XIII.

---

James ii.---10.

*Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.*

SERMON  
XIII.

**I**N the Sacred Writings incidentally occur passages apt at first sight to excite censure by severity, or surprise by singularity; which yet require only a fair inspection to be admitted, and a true explanation to be justified. In this class seems to rank the text: and, under the consciousness of inevitable transgression from frailty contingent by the law of imperfection to the lot of mortality, reason starts; sensibility shrinks, at the idea of general guilt

guilt incurred by partial misconduct, or SERMON  
XIII.  
of a complex law, gathering all the criminality of all its clauses into one; and pursuing consequently with uniform vengeance the single, as the multiplied violation of it. If this be the tenor of the Christian covenant, where is its boasted tenderness of provision for human infirmity.

Shall we then, to mitigate the terrour of the position, reduce its comprehension; pointing and restricting it to the law of charity, the royal law which relates to our neighbour? The context undoubtedly calls for this circumscribed reference. But the difficulty still recurs: it is alike hard in this view of the passage to suppose, that one crime against our neighbour is equivalent to many; and that all are treated by our supreme judge with the same regard, however differing in number, circumstances, or effects.



SERMON  
XIII.How then is the text intelligible, how  
defensible?

I. In the first place, how intelligible? The Apostle hath been reprehending with some energy a prevalent fault among the Christian Converts, respect of persons: he means not surely to condemn those customary distinctions of attention in civil intercourse, adapted to the established distinctions of rank in civil life; for these, though sometimes perhaps carried too far, the subordinations of a community and the dictates of common sense in some degree authorise. But he must intend to note some flagrant preference, operating oppression or insult; or some rude treatment of the more lowly votaries in the assemblies of public worship; or other matter capable of criminality. Whatever this criminal respect of persons might be, the delinquents themselves seem to have been unconscious of it, or to have thought it justifiable. To bring them to a sense of their misconduct, the Apostle reminds them of the great sovereign law of charity according

according to the Scripture ; by which brother-ly love is to be modified and modelled by self-love : and which, the whole of which, they were bound, on pain of moral offence, and its consequences, to fulfill. This great law comprehending and governing many branches was a standing reproof, or universal condemnation on undue personal partialities : and by this law they were accordingly marked as offenders. For “ whoever shall observe, respect, or avowedly obey the whole law, integrally and abstractedly considered, yet offend in one article, or against one object of it, shall come within the hold of all ; ” or be liable to the cognizance of the whole taken comprehensively, which considered in its full extent will, in some part of its contents or reference, involve him as a transgressor. For the same law, the same divine effatum, which forbids adultery, debars murder : the commission of either is consequently alike transgression.

SERMON  
XIII.  


SERMON  
XII.

The result of the preceding explanation is, that the law of Christ, or his rule of charity, is ample in extent, and strict in obligation; that it allows no dispensing power to the conscience, but demands integrity of obedience: and that no violation of it is venial.

So much in explanation of the text. Permit me to remark in passing, that by this explanation of it is at once voided the common objection adduced against it, as tending to establish the Stoical paradox of an equality in sins. By interpreting of the law what is usually interpreted of the law-giver, and, instead of, "He that saith," substituting, "That, which saith, Do not commit adultery, saith also, Do not kill;" the essence of sin is made to consist entirely in the breach of the law. In this view, as breaches of the law, sins may stand all on the same footing (and this, by the way, I believe to be the whole intended by the Stoical tenet;) but they separate and differ, as their aggravations differ, and take their

their guilt in large variety from kinds, motives, and circumstances.

SERMON  
XIII.

II. We have now seen, how the text is intelligible. Let us next consider, how it is defensible, or why such stress is laid on every single violation of the law of Christ.

1. The first reason seems to be, his honour as a lawgiver. Sins of whatever kind, or in whatever degree, are either in opposition to his law, or not; if they are in opposition to his law, they cannot be supposed reconcilable with his will. For to make a law, and disregard the observance of it; or, which is the same thing, to make a law, and leave it in any respect dispensable at the pleasure of those who should obey it; is trifling and inconsistent, unworthy of a legislative character.

2. The next view of these single offences is, their tendency in effect to enervate and vacate his whole law. For every man having his peculiar vice according to the peculiar object of his inclination, this man



SERMON  
XIII.

accordingly infringing one point of the law, a second another, a third a third, and so on; the extent of delinquency must become in event the extent of the law, and the result, taking mankind collectively, the violation by some or other of every article of it. Consequently, without a strict interdict on every single offence, the whole law falls ultimately into neglect.

3. The alliance, the association, of vices pleads farther against the indulgence of these single offences. The robber is frequently driven to the perpetration of murder, in evasion of detection; the knave to lies or multiplied injuries, in disguise or palliation of his frauds; the liar to swearing or a repetition of lies, in support of his falsehood; and the libertine to many a disregard of justice, and many a violation of humanity, in pursuit of his favourite gratifications. In short, there is such a combination in vices, each touches on so many connections, each tends, like a morbid humour, so to propagate itself; that, it is hard to say,

say, how far single offences may spread; and that the existence of them in a detached state, absolutely free from all admixture or adhesion, is perhaps rather a conception of fancy, than an occurrence of fact.

SERMON  
XIII.

4. Let us suppose however otherwise; and consider in the next place the evil derivable from them on society. Repeated acts of the same offence may be not less injurious, than offences diversified with latitude. The fraudulent totally intent on circumvention, the oppressor employing his whole industry to gripe and spoil, the seducer seeking and studying the ruin of innocence; may they not be more mischievous to the community, than many sinners of larger scope, who, while they indulge, perhaps distract, perhaps check and impede, themselves in a variety of pursuits? Especially considering one circumstance; that this partial wickedness is more likely to work with effect, as it works with disguise. Against barefaced villainy, against known dishonesty, caution

SERMON  
XIII.

caution immediately and universally arms itself. But against the reserved and artful offender there is as little guard, as suspicion. And under the mask of some apparent virtue, without which confidence would fly, craft may over-reach credulous faith with a success, the detriment of which is incomputable, and the misery of which may be irremediable.

5. The consequences of this partial wickedness extend farther. It depraves the purity of the heart, and kills principle. It is plain, that, where it is harboured, it excludes innocence; it is not less plain, that without innocence there cannot be rectitude of disposition; and, without rectitude of disposition, the whole scheme of moral conduct must be desultory and capricious. It is plainly again inconsistent with a sincere regard to goodness. The true principle of goodness is a love and reverence of God. But how can he be loved or revered, where there is any disobedience to any of his laws? In every disobedience to his laws,  
if

if committed with thought, his wisdom, SERMON  
XIII. his goodness, or his power, is questioned: his wisdom in appointing the law disobeyed, his goodness in continuing it, or his power in enforcing it. But on either of these suppositions, what becomes of love and of reverence towards him?

In every deliberate disobedience to his laws, there is farther a virtual renunciation of his authority, a rebellion against his sovereignty. Who can pay him the homage of a subject, and at the same time counteract his will? Here therefore likewise the love and the reverence of him fall to the ground. There is an additional consideration; that the object, for which we disobey him, whatever it may be, we esteem for the time above him; we prefer it to his favour: we brave for it his vengeance. And here again consequently must be a deficiency of love and of reverence to him; the influence of which, if genuine and perfect, would



SERMON  
XIII. would produce an obedience, the extent of  
which would be universal.

Upon the whole we may conclude, that even this circumscribed mode of sinning may effectually vitiate the heart, and destroy all that awe of God, on which the purity of it must found itself. And what is the result? Why in the first place, the man thus vitiated is a ready and prepared subject for every temptation. If he have not within him a sufficient check to deter him from *every* transgression, how can he be expected to refrain from *any*? From some, however, let us suppose him estranged, by humour, interest, or convenience; whilst he has no object to allure him, or no uneasiness to stimulate him. But should any temptation of suitable force, peculiarly adapted to his temper or situation, present itself; it is easy to divine, what will be the operation of it; and that his unguided, unfortified resolution, already a captive to one sin, will not long hold out in resistance against another.

2. The

2. The next result is, that he must <sup>SERMON  
XIII.</sup> be wretched within himself; as conscious that he lives in daring offence to his maker, who will be his judge, he can neither enjoy the comforts of virtue, nor the full sweets of vice. If his piety retain any remains of life, or his reflection any power; his mind must be in perpetual agitation: till he can either propitiate God, or bring himself to a disregard of his displeasure; *i. e.* in short, till he can either forsake his sin, or confirm himself, defying all consequences, in the commission of it, he must be harrassed with compunctions, and overwhelmed with apprehensions.

3. But the most fearful result is still behind. He disqualifies himself for the enjoyments of the Blessed in Heaven. The happiness of Heaven, like the happiness of earth, must be relative, dependent on the disposition. It is an unquestionable and great happiness; yet a happiness to those particular persons only, who possess the preparative qualifications for the reception  
of

SERMON  
XIII.

of it. This preparative qualification must be the formation of moral habits by an uniform discharge of duty. If therefore we suffer ourselves to be in any respect vitiated by an impenitent disobedience to the commands of God; we must remain neither fit associates for his spiritual train, nor fit, nor disposed partakers of his spiritual happiness.

In the preceding reflections I would not be misunderstood. I mean all along by single offences, not single acts of transgression, not casual compliances with a sudden temptation; which surprise, or even the frail sallies of unwatched inclination, may extenuate, which human infirmity can scarcely avoid; but willful, deliberate, presumptuous habits of offence, committed against conviction, and persisted in without remorse. These are the "offences in one point," which the text must be supposed to condemn. Yet even these repentance may expiate: repentance, ever ready, and, if sincere, not ineffectual, in recommending  
fins

fin of all kinds to mercy ; repentance, that gracious restorative to divine favour, by which sincerity is accepted for innocence, and progressive virtue for perfection ; repentance, that inestimable condition of the Christian covenant, the sole refuge of the bad, and a resource of dependence in some degree even to the good. Let this, the view of this grace rouse the careless, and inspirit the confidante ; let it produce circumspection in shunning guilt, or earnestness in deprecating and correcting it ; let it in particular induce each of us, as each of us has his ruling passion, and in consequence of it his criminal propensity, to search impartially the bosom for favourite sins in order to subdue and expel them ; that our Christianity may not be a mutilated principle, an unfinished scheme of unequal observances ; but an entire and constant submission of conscientious obedience, through Jesus Christ, &c.

SERMON  
XIII.

S E R -



---



---

## S E R M O N XIV.

---

Prov. i.---10.

*My Son, if Sinners entice thee, consent  
thou not.*

SERMON  
XIV.  
~

THE insinuation of error, the prevalence of vice, and the disappointments of well directed endeavours in the charge of education, afford a frequent, but melancholy, subject of reflexion.

It is an important enquiry, from whence they arise; how those sad changes from rectitude to depravity, which we deplore and dread in the noviciate of life, happen. The text points to one principal source of them,

them, which is no other than the enticement of practised sinners; who having, like Cain, “fled from the presence of the Lord,” strive to draw as many as they can after them; hoping, perhaps, to extenuate or protect their crimes, by multiplying their adherents.

SERMON  
XIV.

To guard against these seducers, let us inspect their lure; or, in other words, examine, with a short refutation, some pleas, which they generally or incidentally employ to loosen principle, and pervert conduct.

I. The first and boldest essay is to close up the mind against the belief of an overruling power, and a future retribution, by resolving every thing into the sway of chance, fate, or necessity. From these blind unintelligible powers, we are told, sprung originally the world and its contents, by these are it and its movements all actuated, by these will it and its creatures be all ultimately determined, and conditioned.

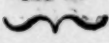
Q

SERMON  
XIV.

ditioned. To expose this pretence, so far, at least, as calculated to influence behaviour, without entering at present into a direct confutation of it; let us leave it simply to its own consequences, to be convicted of folly. For if chance made the world, notwithstanding all its admired characters of wisdom; why may it not as well happen that by some mysterious train of effects a worse lot should attend on those whom we call irreligious, a better on those who bear the contrary character; that by the same train of effects, a revival, a second being, should follow in a subsequent state; and that either here or hereafter by some natural temperament or relative influence, the same which inclines to wickedness or goodness, the former should be disposed to misery, the latter to happiness.

But if chance be rejected for fate, and all things exist by necessity; then retribution or a future state may be necessary too; and the wicked necessarily miserable in it, for any thing there is in this hypothesis

to

to the contrary. Where every thing is supposed casual, or every thing necessary ; SERMON  
XIV.  it is impossible to assign a just reason, why any thing, that may be conceived future, should or should not exist, or should or should not exist after such or such a manner. And therefore all things of this nature must be equally probable; and nothing can be alledged to determine the mind one way, rather than another. On his own scheme then he, who takes up this subterfuge, errs : with the most perverse inconsistency, when he ought not to act at all, or when he ought, at least, to resolve on the safest side, which is that of general persuasion, he rejects a prevailing system, which carries with it the sanction of ages and the promise of happiness, for a doubtful novelty ; without any preponderancy of proof, and under the threat of interminable misery.

The next, more common, plausibility in the scheme of seduction from the guidance of religion is, by representing it as an enemy to intellectual liberty. “ Re-

Q 2

ligion



SERMON  
XIV.

ligion cramps thought : religion overawes and controls imagination, abridges and pinions assent : religion finally imposes the hardship of a submissive and implicit faith on the shackled understanding." But what then is, in fact, intellectual liberty ? Is it a power to be deceived, to embrace error where truth appears, to deny consent to evidence, to disbelieve against the fairest appearances of credibility, to determine against the strongest motives of action ; *i. e.* in effect, to judge against judgment, believe against belief, and act against possibility ? Or is it an entire suspension of the mind, a perpetual and absolute indifference to this or that determination, this or that action : which is, in other words, a distrust, a disuse, amounting to a renunciation, of all our faculties and principles ? Or is it again a power to think and act for ourselves without any foreign influence ; a right to yield to no reasons or motives, but those of our own growth ; a right to which we want just so much title, as we want infallibility. No surely :  
consistent

consistent liberty is not a claim to reason falsely, to commit wrong, to refuse an offered and discerned benefit; but a power to do right, and to reason truly, when the understanding is disengaged from every cloud, film, or clog, and in a capacity of giving every proposition or impulse its due moment: and if even authority carry with it an information and an advantage, a help by which our knowledge may be improved, our conceptions enlarged, our defects remedied; shall we be hindered by any arrogant opinion of ourselves, from seeing and enjoying it?

SERMON  
XIV.

This procedure were absurd with respect to man: it is still more glaringly so with respect to God. Supposing him to take us under his direction, supposing him from his infinite wisdom which alone comprehends all fitness, to lay before us a rule of life or a scheme of happiness, grounded on the most capacious and most accurate views of exigence and expediency; shall we disclaim the benefit, because there is a homage to authority in the admission of it? Nay, if

Q 3

from

SERMON  
XIV.

from the operation of this rule of life, or this scheme of happiness, on reason, or on the passions, we find errors corrected, or deficiencies supplied; if we are enabled in consequence of it, to see truth with more clearness, or pursue good with more certainty; if in either, or in any, respect we become less bewildered, or less impeded; are we not gainers by it, even in the article of freedom? What is here put as a supposition, is the actual purpose and just praise of Christianity; it demands submission, but only to confer blessings; it circumscribes fancy, but only to regulate its flights; it calls for an exercise of faith, as no revelation can establish itself by any other expedient, but only to rescue from ignorance, from doubt, from illusion, from misery. Let us hear no more therefore of the suggestions against it, as being adverse to true liberty; of which it is, in right estimation, the friend, the deliverer, the assistant; not the destroyer or oppressor,

III. Where

III. Where encroachment on the native SERMON  
XIV. privilege of mental liberty is not made the plea of seduction from the embrace of piety; the charge of insufficient support, and defective evidence, sometimes is. The evidence of religion is not utterly denied: it is not pronounced, in opposition to the multitude of intelligent believers, absolutely frivolous and futile; but incomplete and incompetent. It is insinuated, that the improvement of it by an ample addition may be imagined; might therefore be expected, or not improperly wished. But is not this allegation without force, because without end? Increase proofs to whatever amount, strengthen them to whatever power; may it not still be asked, why are they not more in number, or more powerful?

But let us sift the matter yet farther. If a person communicate to me a relation, which it is for his interest that I should believe; it is his concern to give me such assurance of it as I require, even though less than I require ought to be sufficient:

Q 4

and



SERMON  
XIV.

and if I still remain incredulous, however unreasonably so, it is incumbent on him to go on varying proofs or accumulating witnesses, 'till I shall declare myself fully satisfied. The reason is, because the loss or the inconvenience will be his, and his only; if I should not yield to conviction. But on the other side, if the communication, which he imparts, be true; and it be for my advantage only, not at all for his, that I should credit it; if he will be neither a gainer nor a loser, whether I credit it or not: then if he give me such evidence for the truth of it, as might convince a man of unprejudiced reason, he has done enough; he has done all that was incumbent on him as a friend, and exceptions from me afterwards to the mode, or the measure of it, are neither grateful nor decent. The representation of this argument is the case of religion. It reveals an important system of truths, with high marks of authenticity in the miracles accompanying it, for the enlargement of our knowledge, and the advancement of our salvation. If we accept

cept it, the event affects ourselves, we shall SERMON  
XIV. be the gainers; if we reject it, our own  interest is at stake, we shall be the sufferers: and whatever be its fate, whether acceptance or rejection, the wisdom, the goodness, the happiness of its author remain the same, incapable of augmentation or diminution. Let this circumstance then be weighed, when its credentials are questioned. It will shew us, that whatever sort or degree of evidence God hath vouchsafed for the support of his doctrine, if such as may satisfy caution, whether or not such as may satisfy imagination, discretion directs to enjoy, and gratitude not to reproach, it; that forecast is his part, acquiescence ours.

IV. The enticements hitherto mentioned strike at principle: let us now turn to those, which seem more immediately to appropriate the reference of the text, the glosses and incentives of sin.

The

SERMON  
XIV.

The first is an experiment on curiosity. We are weak, we are frail; but we are also diffident and timid: not naturally disposed to venture on new and untried schemes; nor, when we have a plain, marked road before us, to strike into devious paths, without seeing in them first the footsteps of others. To obviate therefore the opposition of this native jealousy, the gay seducer, on his return from his vicious fallies, amuses the fancy with captivating news of the scenes which he has viewed, and the gratifications which he has enjoyed, far preferable to the poor satisfactions, with which virtue repays its votaries: a report this, well calculated, as ease, freedom, vivacity and joy are efficacious attractives, to awaken attention and win upon compliance. But the tale is mutilated, and the representation delusive. Like the spies of Joshua, these men bring, though in a different way, a false account of the land: they tell us of the milk and honey with which it flows, but forget the gall and the bitterness, which  
are

are mingled in large proportion with the produce of it. Not a word is mentioned of the disappointments, the languors, the maladies, the perplexities, the risques which they have endured in their irregular pursuits; not a hint escapes of the remonstrances of conscience, the fears of reproach, and the more awful presages of death and futurity, which have broken in, with irresistible force, on their most refined delights. These circumstances, which might frustrate the snare, are suppressed; and we are thus invited to a sort of enchanted feast, where elegance charms, and various temptation solicits; but where there is no substance, or where a lurking poison corrupts and overpowers the relish of all the delicacies.

V. The unwary are sometimes again misled by a similar delusion in respect to success; in respect to the flattering facility of obtaining it by wickedness, rather than by strict probity: a delusion as extensive in effect, as the pursuits in which they may



SERMON  
XIV.  may be engaged; and as liable to influence their means of prosecution, as their wishes of accomplishment are ardent. If gain then be their object, they may, perhaps, be taught, what arts of fraud and subtleties of prevarication may increase their store; that a single hour under the direction of knavery may enrich more effectually than tedious years under the employment of industry; that deceit may extract greater advantage from well-invented falshood, than honesty from truth; that more is attainable by a single act of violence than by a continued application to labour,

What is observed of gain, may be applied with equal impression to honour, power, or other incentives of human desires: and the advice here suggested is incidentally seconded by a too certain and too prevalent consideration, that these acquisitions awe the world into respect, wherever found, or by whatever means procured; supposing, therefore, that you advance in fortune or station by unjustifiable methods, who, it may be hinted, will dare to tell you so? Give these  
enticers,

enticers, however, no credit, when they SERMON  
XIV. boast of the compendiousness, the smoothness, the pleasure of the secret way, that leads to their object of pursuit, whether it be wealth, honour, or power. They keep the dark side of the fact from your view. Bid them produce the whole of it: bid them recount the fears of the villain, whilst he is perpetrating an act of dishonesty: bid them add the stings of his feelings afterwards, with his continual apprehensions of detection: and when these are thrown into the scale, the specious and pleasurable scheme proposed will be found wanting in an essential requisite to render it eligible. Those, who adopt it may be rich, may be powerful, but cannot be happy.

VI. Another method yet remains of making profelytes to sin, by representing the yoke of religion, as hard and rigid, and grievous to be borne. Religion is called in general an human institution, calculated only by ingenious policy to subject simplicity: its followers are represented as  
disci-

SERMON  
XIV.

disciplinants debarred from the use of those privileges, which nature allows them : and we have been told further, that conscience is but a name, a bug-bear of our own making, to affright ourselves with honour or honesty, an artificial and empty title ; that man is to find his satisfaction in this life, which cannot be done by living scrupulously, but by indulging freely. In answer to this imposing account, bid the authors of it reflect ; that assuming religion to be nothing but an engine of policy, the invention of it is, at least, a proof of its utility ; that the very subsistence of it in the world demonstrates some comfort or benefit deducible from it ; and that the bare chance of its truth, since so much depends upon it, is a sufficient motive for embracing it. Observe to them also, that if conscience, and its train of virtues, be mere creatures of imagination ; they have still, as they are regarded or neglected, all the influence of realities, the unavoidable effect of pleasure or pain with respect to individuals, of advantage or detriment with respect to society. Tell them

them again, that piety is neither slavery nor misery; that it leads to truth, which is the liberty of the understanding, and to goodness consisting in the just balance of the passions, which is the liberty of the will; that far from being an austere enemy even to worldly gratifications, it permits the enjoyment of many, whilst it heightens their gust; that it would only wean us from those, which, at the same time that they disgrace our nature, will never repay our affection: and lastly, that it hath certain calm and pure delights peculiar to itself, arising from self-approbation, and the hope of a happy immortality, which are neither dependent on accidents, nor subject to satiety; of which those, who have not experienced them, cannot estimate the value, and of which those, who would proscribe them, cannot recompence the loss.

From the preceding enumeration of enticements, by which guile sometimes too successfully works on ductile inexperience, one grand inference results; the expediency



SERMON  
XIV.

ency of caution in the choice of associates. "My Son, if vicious companions, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." All such means of enticement sedulously avoid. Nor be flattered with the fallacious possibility of conversing in dissolute society without imitation. 'Tis a dangerous experiment. Friendship finds, or makes, men alike: your licentious companion possesseth a large share of your esteem for qualities, which you have distinguished: his faults will appear, on that account, less disgusting: daily observance of them will render them in time almost imperceptible: few can separate the vice from the man; and your attachment to the one will soon lessen your abhorrence of the other. Be guarded, therefore, my son, against sinners of every aspect; against their access; or, as this may be wished rather than expected, against their arts of every texture. By whatever cavils assailed, waver not; with whatever difficulties surrounded, faint not; by whatever solicitations allured, "consent not."

S E R-



SERMON  
XV.

admonished. Still unsatisfied, and anticipating from an extraordinary event an extraordinary effect, the petitioner re-urges his proposal, and receives the decisive answer of the text; that if the careless sinner can resist or neglect the dictates of a sanctioned revelation, neither will he be swayed to obedience by a revival from the dead.

A seeming paradox! which yet it is not difficult to verify, both from reason and experience: I mean by the latter the testimony of history, as well as immediate observation.

I. Let us attend then to the suggestions of reason on the subject.

With what strength of impression this awful appearance of a departed spirit might strike the fancy, with what weight of authority it ought to act upon persuasion, is not here determined: it is affirmed only, that its authority is inferior to that of the  
standing

standing records of religion, and that where the impression of the latter fails, the former will not be more efficacious. SERMON  
XV.

Let us examine accordingly the pleas respectively adducible in support of each.

In one circumstance they both concur, as revelations: but revelations, with very distinct and dissimilar credentials. To miracles displayed, and prophecies completed, religion chiefly refers consideration; the religion of Christ, additionally, or rather with an union of both, to the illustrious incident of his resurrection. On these miracles and these prophecies, many in number, various in nature, unquestionable in origin, public in accomplishment, directed to an important and certain end, and attested, sometimes with the loss, often with the peril of life, by numerous and competent vouchers, it boldly rests its pretensions.

R. 2

What



SERMON  
XV.

What now hath the visit of an emigrant from the dead to oppose in contrast?

It is, or it may be, a miracle, *i. e.* a divine legation: but it is a single miracle, transacted privately with a single person, its end professedly good, possibly abusive: if the former, *i. e.* if designed to inculcate truth or enforce virtue, unnecessary, because anticipated by religion; and, whatever its end may be, without other testimony for its reception, than that of the emigrant himself: with respect to whom, yet farther, what security is there against delusion? He comes without premonition, or preparation; he wants therefore one grand criterion of credibility. He tells his tale, and departs. If his appearance be transient, may not imagination resolve it into a sudden, unaccountable, illusion of surprise? If for a given time with a continued communication, may not terror, for we can hardly suppose a continuance of such an event without terror, operate with too much agitation, to leave the judgment satisfied with respect to

to the reporter, or at least the memory SERMON  
XV.  
with respect to the report? If he repeat  
his appearance with repeated communica-  
tion; where is still the assurance, that  
he is not a phantom, or being of some  
unknown order, who hath invested him-  
self, or is invested, with a known form,  
for some purpose of deception; a notion  
not inadmissible, whilst it is conceivable,  
that there are spirits, of whose powers  
we are ignorant, and of whose malignity  
we may be suspicious; or that even hu-  
man spirits may retain after death, and  
be capable of exercising, the same dis-  
positions, with which they were actuated  
in life.

But apart from these natural inferen-  
ces, allowing that he is what he claims  
to be; must it follow, that his tale will  
be heard with submission? Is there not  
conceivable a state of mind, in which  
no spectacle can work on regard, and no  
address on persuasion; in which obdu-  
racy can exclude every instructive object

SERMON  
XV.

from notice, or affecting impression from acknowledgment? Not however to suppose, as not required, in the present case this extreme of infatuation, let us listen to the tale. It is a relation of another state, in which disembodied souls exist with such and such discriminated allotments. But is this other than the mere relation of a foreigner or traveller, who notifies from avowed sight the inhabitants, or the occurrences, of a remote region: receivable consequently with distrust, as other relations of other travellers are, because depending on personal attestation only? Or, granting it true, can the party, to whom it is addressed, be assured, that it involves his concern? The state declared may be existent, the allotments described may be real; but they may not be his state, or his allotments: for betwixt a state and succession to it, betwixt allotments and the transmission of them, there is no discernible necessity of connexion.

Let

Let us, however, to make the most of <sup>SERMON</sup> the relation, suppose it to be delivered <sup>XV.</sup> by the relater under the asserted sanction of a commission from God. Yet where is the proof of this commission; not supposedly, nor allowably, without innumerable objections, which all conspire against the credit of the relater, by miracles, nor yet convincingly from his bare appearance: since he may certainly come from another world, without coming from God, without communion in his counsels, or participation of his authority.

II. With such exceptions may the impugner or despiser of revealed religion easily argue away the impression of an appearing emissary from the dead: with such arguments accordingly pleads reason in defence of the text, Let us now try it by experience.

1. The universe surrounds us with miracles. Its beauty, grandeur, stability, its exact uniformity, and endless, yet uncon-



SERMON  
XV.

~ fused variety, the dependency of its parts, and the harmony of its revolutions, the vicissitude of seasons, which pass into each other with a gradual alteration nicely adjusted to health and fertility, the periodical flux of the tides, which in the ocean produce a grand source of alimental vapour, the curious provisions of nature against the putrefaction of air or its noxious effects, the production of vegetables in infinite diversity through their regular processes of growth, with similitudes of figure distinct, and every property characteristic of their tribes, the formation of animals in innumerable species inclusive of innumerable individuals, advancing as in a scale through different proportions of size, with different degrees of perfection, compounded with substances of curious texture, organised with nice symmetry, possessing perceptions, exercising functions, pursuing rules, proper to their situation,---these striking appearances, and the steady succession of each from the farthest extent of time without failure, carry, to well regulated

regulated attention, persuasive proofs of divine agency.

SERMON  
XV.



Yet there are, who can reduce this complex wonder to the operation of chance, or fate, or necessity, or any unintelligent, unintelligible principle, exclusive of Deity. And is it imaginable, that thinkers of this stamp would be impressed into a reform by an apparition? Supposing them to behold in it a lively figure, with the genuine aspect, of a remembered acquaintance; yet, would not those, who could conceive this acquaintance, with all the energies and uses, arrangements and excellencies, of his structure, originally formed by an accidental concurrence of particles, or other cause of similar obscurity, be as ready to empower the same cause with the sportive faculty of recombining the same particles in their prior form, and reanimating them with their prior motions. On all such men therefore the trial of the project in the parable must be regarded as hopeless.

2. With

SERMON  
XV.

2. With the treatment of the preceding miracles may be paralleled, for the further illustration of the text ; the treatment of some awful events in life. I will mention one, namely Death ; of which the approach is a concern at once certain and imperceptible, the issue a fate at once tremendous and interminable. Yet it is unheeded, or at least unimproved in conduct. Death occasionally presents a spectacle, which must touch sensibility, and ought to inspire earnest sentiments of duty ; that particularly of a desponding friend racked, on the perceived advance of it, with the compunctions, and agitated with the terrors, of an awakened conscience. He summons to review his guilty pleasures ; their relish is now converted into anguish : an anguish, which begins his punishment before his condemnation : and he calls with eager solicitude on those around him, to escape his sufferings by shunning his actions. What follows ? They hear him, perhaps with a tear, perhaps with a pang of remorse ; they depart, and forget him : society re-  
cheers

cheers the spirits, temptation blandishes with fresh allurements, the grave idea wears gently away; and a few days, sometimes a few hours, plunge them into the very delusions, against which they have been warned with such circumstances of solemnity.

SERMON  
XV.

But why should we recur on this occasion to the neglected memento of a dying friend? When, what hath passed in the bosoms of many, on the attack of a mortally threatening disease, may furnish an example yet more illustrative. Let them recollect with what emotions they were penetrated, under the impression of their danger, by the opening prospects of futurity; with what importunity they implored the mercy of a longer respite for reformation, with what reiterated resolutions, assurances, vows, they inspirited themselves against the repetition of their criminal follies. Yet on the return of health, how weakly often have they proved their gratitude to a delivering Providence, and their fidelity to their own voluntary promises; how



SERMON  
XV.

how soon have they reinstated, first in thought, next in complacency and wishes, then boldly in indulgence, the criminal objects of their late self-reproach: as if they had only rolled up under the tongue, in view of a scourge, a precious reserve for a favourable opportunity of rumination; and at length, seemed almost to repent themselves of their late repentance! Here are then applications from sight, from report, from experience: yet negligence can supersede them. And might not the same negligence also supersede the application of a special Missionary from the Spiritual World? Could he render himself more formidable than Death, properly surveyed in all its shapes, and with all its appendages? Or could he plead the cause of virtue more forcibly, than a dying Penitent? Could he excite more temporary seriousness, than our own feelings on the threat of dissolution?

3. Perhaps, however, it may be rejoined, that the issue of Death is contingency only, and that the counsels of the  
dying

dying party are only prefages, and that the feelings described are of the same cast; SERMON XV. misgivings from mere uncertainty. Let us endeavour then to draw the argument still closer.

What a scene of judgments was opened upon Pharaoh! All the Ministers of divine vengeance seemed to be let loose against him and his kingdom: air, earth, sea, and innumerable of their inhabitants poured in, as it were with a confederate insurrection, their severest mischiefs. Yet he resisted them. He was surprised, and he considered; he was terrified, and he relented. But he prosecuted, in the moment of safety, the rashness of his rage and his perfidy.

Similar reports are recorded in Scripture of other persons under other afflictions: of Ahaz, that amidst all the disasters of his invasion he was insensible; of the Israelites in their return from Egypt, amidst their repeated punishments, that they were ei-  
ther

SERMON  
XV.  
~~~~~ ther incorrigible, or irresolute and inconstant.

And of what avail would the introduction of a divine messenger, with any new commission, have proved in these instances? They each knew with incontestable evidence the intervention of God in their visitations; that he was the author of them. Could a newly commissioned messenger, even from the dead, assert more, or affect consequently with more power such callous delinquents?

4. If these instances should yet be conceived not cases in point; two absolute parallels remain: one, the revival of Lazarus; the other, the revival of our Saviour; both historical facts. The whole nation of the Jews saw, in familiar intercourse, the former after his known recall from death; the soldiers, who watched the sepulchre, saw with extraordinary tremours the egress of the latter from it, after the removal of the stone by an Angel. Yet the one, the Jewish

Jewish nation, instead of acknowledging SERMON
XV. with adoration the miraculous act, only persecuted the agent with exasperated violence; and the others, the soldiers, with a sacrifice of truth to a pitiful emolument, consented for a bribe to deny what they had seen, and retract what they had announced. Into such men could any delegate from the kingdom of spirits infuse principle, or firmness in the support of it?

I will now, supposing the position of the text justified, subjoin on the whole one remark.

From that memorable decision it is presumable, that the evidence of the Christian religion imparted in the Scriptures is adequate, and that the Almighty deemed it so, to win the assent of the enquirer, and to effect the conversion of the sinner. The demand of an addition is therefore impertinent; it is absurd too: a demand without reason, because without end; every pretender having the same title to be gratified in the projects

of

SERMON
XV.

of his fancy as any one: a demand, on farther inspection, of a novelty, which can supply no accession to the motives, or heightening to the obligations, of duty; of a suffrage, which can be of no aid in the spread of Revelation, because its power of conviction is doubtful, momentary, and confined; and of a precedent, which leads in event to an incessant multiplication of miracles, consequentially destroying, together with the order of creation, both their nature and their use by familiarity.

Let us then with reverential contentment improve the advantages, we derive from the sacred communications, which we possess. If with these advantages, with sufficient knowledge for our direction, with sufficient arguments for our conviction, with sufficient authority for our submission, and sufficient succour for our preservation, we become impenitently persisting patrons of infidelity, or partisans of vice: how justly merciless will be our sentence of condemnation! That we may forecast and escape it, God grant, through Jesus Christ, &c.

S E R-

S E R M O N XVI.

(Preached on CHRISTMAS DAY.)

Luke ii.---1, 6.

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed (and this taxing was first made, when Cyrenius was governor of Syria): and all went to be taxed every one into his own city: and Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the City of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the City of David, which is called Bethlehem (because he was of the house and lineage of David), to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child: And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

TH E Nativity of Christ, considering
the expectations which it accom-
plished, the occurrences with which it was
S distin-

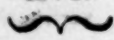
SERMON
XVI.

distinguished, and the effects which followed it, is, abstracted from its high import in the dispensation of Redemption, the most illustrious event in the annals of mankind. In the text stand recorded two particulars relative to it; the place *where*, and the time *when* it happened; each worthy of note: let us make each a subject of speculation.

I. The place of his nativity was not Nazareth, the residence of his parent, but Bethlehem: and not the obscure Bethlehem in the neighbourhood of Nazareth, but far distant; the royal city of that name in the southern adjacencies of Jerusalem. A circumstance this, however accidental in appearance, a coincidence of occurrences rendered too extraordinary, to be merely casual. Augustus had appointed, by a decree, the second of the sort in his reign, a survey of his empire; not immediately or solely a taxation of it, but a census or recorded account of persons, estates, riches, &c. for civil and military estimation: which

which took place about three, or, according to the vulgar computation, about seven years before the era of Christ; but reached Judea at the period of his birth with a delay not unaccountable, considering the long and necessarily slow steps of its progress through the provinces of Cœlesyria, Phenice, and other districts antecedent to its operation in Bethlehem. By the appointment of this census, the mother of Jesus, whose descent from David is not deduced, yet not to be questioned; because both declared explicitly and implicitly, explicitly in the asserted lineage of her child, implicitly in her relation to Joseph, whose genealogy is recorded, was compelled, though far advanced in pregnancy, to brave the fatigue and the danger of a distant journey to the patrimonial city of that monarch; where presumably the complex business of a crowded multitude protracted her continuance, till she was delivered of her sacred burden. In the whole progress of this occurrence, what a conjuncture of strange and important circumstances;

SERMON
XVI.



SERMON
XVI.

in short, what a comprehensive reach of a contriving Providence; to authenticate thus solemnly the birth of our Saviour by an inscribed notice of it in public records, to make the census of a Roman Emperor an instrument for that purpose, and, still farther, to accomplish a Prophecy! For here lies a grand stress of the event: it was in conformity to the following prediction, uttered seven hundred years before by the Prophet Micah: "But thou Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little, (little in extent, little in comparative population,) among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me, that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."* In this plain passage, the Jews, both learned and unlearned, were furnished with a standing document to determine with precision and without hesitation, where the true Christ should indispensably have his birth. The reply of the chief priests and scribes to the demand of Herod on this subject, Mat. ii. 5. was ready, was decisive:

* Micah v. 2.

and

and in John vii. 42. the people without discrimination, the common multitude, who were strangers to the first history of Jesus, when they no longer doubted the other indications of his mission, were yet staggered with one difficulty, that they conceived him not to have been born where their Scriptures had fixed the nativity of the Messiah. " Shall Christ, say they, come out of Galilee? Hath not the Scripture said, that Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was : " the event therefore, accurately answering the prediction, hath now added a satisfactory assurance to our faith.

But why, it hath been jeeringly asked, should Judea be the appropriated place of his birth, why should he be sent to work his miracles, and publish his Gospel, in a remote, obscure corner, amongst a despised people, the Jews ; instead of being manifested at Rome, which was then the grand theatre of the world ; where his pretensions might have been more easily

SERMON
XVI.

examined? It may be justly said in reply, that revelation must set out with an introduction somewhere; that, if it be allowed reasonable for the promulger of it to be a real man, his birth and converse, his life, death, and resurrection must be in some particular country; that wherever it originated, it was an undoubted act of favour conferred on that people, which, though it might be with good ground hoped by such as felt the want, and were disposed for the reception, of it, yet could not of right be demanded; that there was consequently no absolute obligation, at the same time that, considering the various circumstances, situations, capacities, and dispositions of mankind, it was neither possible nor proper, to communicate it to all immediately or equally; and that such short-sighted creatures, as we are, may in many cases absurdly arraign, and must be in most inadequate judges, to determine the nice fitnesses of divine conduct in the appointments of Providence.

But,

But, to be still more particular, it may ^{SERMON}
also be said, that the Jews, who were the ^{XVI}
depositories of the prophetic writings, that
is, in fact, of the evidences for the proof
of the Messiah, were not really an obscure
nation, but a powerful and numerous peo-
ple; whose country had, perhaps, more
inhabitants than any other of the same ex-
tent throughout the world. For in their
wars with the Romans they were so for-
midable both in number and in valour;
that, had it not been for the supply, which
their enemies derived from the conquered
provinces, the conquest of them could not
have been effected. There were also dis-
persed through all countries, ever since the
Babylonish captivity, vast numbers of them,
who kept a continual correspondence with
their metropolis, Jerusalem: and all of
them frequently repaired thither to "cele-
brate their Passover;" by which means
there was a communication with Judea,
through all Asia and Europe, where they
were scattered. Hence, whatever was
transacted in Jerusalem, at the Passover
S 4 especially,

SERMON
XVI.

especially, was as likely to be known over all the world, as what was transacted in Rome ; for at that season, there were nearly as many people in Jerusalem, as at any particular period in Rome. Our Saviour, therefore, appearing, and performing his miracles, in Jerusalem at the Passover, his history was not less likely to become the general topic of fame, than if Rome had been the theatre of his manifestation : and the witnesses, who saw there the displays of his power, were not less credible persons, than could have been found in any nation whatever ; at the same time that there was not less opportunity, than could have been possessed in any other place, for strangers to scrutinize the truth of the asserted facts. On the other hand, suppose that our Saviour had appeared and performed his miracles at Rome ; might not this very circumstance have raised an objection of some moment in all the conquered countries ? For as the Romans had erected by victory an universal empire, which they maintained by slavery ; might
not

not the subject nations have justly entertained an aversion to every thing issuing from that quarter? Would they not have been naturally suspicious of every thing reported to have been done there; as if it were designed and propagated merely to work an engine of the conquerors, and to fasten the chains of the conquered?

S E R M O N
XVI.

II. From the place *where*, let us now turn our view to the time, *when* the Saviour of mankind appeared. It is not here my purpose to settle with laboured discussion the precise day, or even the precise year of his nativity; about which there is, confessedly, some minute variety in chronological computation. The juncture of time in general, or the age of the world in which he came, is sufficiently notorious. It was, when Herod was King over Judea, in the reign of Augustus Cæsar, the second Roman Emperor. So much is admitted by all. I will therefore only offer a few short remarks, to shew the general expediency of the period chosen by him for his manifestation:

SERMON
XVI.

tation : since it hath been boldly objected, amongst other insinuations against his religion : why was it so long with-held ; what particular fitness marks the epoch assigned to the publication of it : if necessary at all, why not before ; if a blessing, why so tardy ?

The objection observably bears a near affinity to the known objection of the Atheist against the creation of the world ; that, if in truth created, it would surely have been created sooner. And yet, by the very nature of the thing, if it ever was created, *i. e.* ever had a beginning, there must have been a time, when it was just so near that beginning, or of the same age, as it is supposed to be now. By consequence, either this argument is of no force at all, or the world must never have been created, *i. e.* must have been from eternity ; against which there lie much stronger arguments : and by consequence, again, it is highly reasonable to suppose, that he, who made it, knew the fittest time of making it. So,
in

in like manner, he, who sent his Son into SERMON
XVI. the world to reveal his will and to save mankind, best knew the proper time to send him: hence consequently the juncture, at which he was sent, may be supposed the fittest.

But let us survey the juncture, in which Christ delivered his revelation, yet more closely; to discover more forcibly some circumstances then distinguishable, of peculiar pertinence or advantage to the introduction of it. Prophecy had progressively and regularly announced it: previous dispensations had subsisted to found, and been tried to illustrate, it: mankind were sufficiently multiplied, to enlarge the necessity and extend the benefits of it: general expectation too, prepared by the wide dispersion of the Jews, and the consequent knowledge of their inspired writings, was on the watch to descry and consider it. Had this revelation broken in abruptly, without an opening dawn and gradual disclosure; it might have been an object of
asto-

SERMON
XVI.

astonishment, not properly understood or enjoyed; had its appearance been of earlier date, attention might not have been excited to meet it with the same ardour, or remark it with the same circumspection: had it been postponed to a later day, its upbraided tardiness would have been aggravated, its evidences might have been obscured, and zeal, if not deluded by imposture, might have yielded under long disappointment to hopeless and careless incredulity.

But, besides these general preparatives, the age of Christ exhibited also some characters of distinction, some special references and remarkable incidents, which may seem to render it the fittest of any for his birth. It was, according to the prediction of Jacob, Gen. xlix, just before the total dissolution of the Jewish government, in that critical era, in which the Jews were not destroyed, yet conquered; a collective body, yet a Roman colony under a subordinate and accountable sovereignty. The plain consequences

sequences of this situation were the toleration of their worship, the preservation of their records, the regulation of their civil power, and the notoriety of their conduct. Had they been destroyed or dispersed, the memorials of the Messiah in their history, in their prophecies, and in the prefigurations of their religious rites, might have been destroyed or dispersed with them: had they been unsubdued, they would have been uncontrouled, exempt from that restraint in the infliction of capital punishment, which circumscribed their opposition to the ministry of our Saviour by precluding an immediate or premature attempt on his life: and had they been independent, his actions, and their proceedings against him, would have been less speedily, less diffusively, less certainly known; by wanting the communication of the Roman Governor, who was obliged both by duty, and for his own safety, to transmit a report of all memorable occurrences to his imperial master.

SERMON
XVI.

Further,

SERMON
XVI.

Further, the age of Christ was not only just before the total dissolution of the Jewish government, according to the prediction of Jacob, Gen. xlix: but just before the destruction of the second temple; which his personal presence, within it, did, and could alone enoble with a pre-eminence over the first, the splendid edifice of Solomon; according to the notices of other Prophets, Haggai, and Malachi: and, according to that of Daniel, just seventy weeks from the rebuilding of the city after the captivity; *i. e.* prophetic weeks, seven times seventy, or four hundred years: after which term, or with a difference amounting, at the widest distance of calculation, to not more than ten years, by a misconception of the Jewish lunar year easily misreckoned, our Saviour will be found to begin his history. Or if this be doubted, it is of little moment, since, at whatever term he might begin his history, it is an undeniable fact, that soon after he was cut off, or within a few years after his passion, ensued the destruction

destruction of the city and sanctuary, with the discontinuance of the sacrifice and the oblation, those grand events presignified by the Prophet as characteristically pointing out the coming of the Messiah.

SERMON
XVI.

But the age of Christ was yet further that era, when both civility and science flourished in an advanced state, with an influence that roused the spirit of enquiry, and laid the foundation of every species of improvement: that era, when profound peace, a long unexperienced blessing, which afforded as well leisure for attention to instruction, as security in the diffusion of it, prevailed without any significant interruption universally. The inhabitants of the globe were, in the early ages of it, divided into small independent communities, differing in language, laws, manners, and worship, alienated by contrary views, embroiled by interfering interests, convulsed with perpetual, often sanguinary hostilities, and occupied by their own narrow pursuits, without possessing, or seeking by voyages,

SERMON
XVI. voyages, information of distant coun-
tries.

During this rude and turbulent period, it is manifest, that the advances of any new Religion must have been, humanly speaking, feeble and doubtful. With what effect could it have acted against the opposition of multiplying difficulties, from the confusion of a disunited world, from the want of commerce to promote and facilitate communication, from the unformed tongues and various institutions of ignorant Barbarians, from the fierce feuds and licentious violences of savage and distracted nations? Even in later times, the world was still agitated, with rare intermission, till the approach of our Saviour, by contests of war and revolutions of conquest, Greece wresting monarchy from Persia, to yield up soon afterwards the fugitive glory of it to Rome; Judea sharing in the common perturbation, under various oppressions of the Syrians, till it fell with other vain projectors of resistance under the Roman

man yoke ; and Rome itself, after devour-
 ing all the kingdoms within the flight
 of its conquering Eagle, dividing into fac-
 tions, which filled it and its dependencies
 with anarchy, animosity, slaughter and de-
 vastation. Here again, amidst these com-
 motions Christianity must have struggled
 in its passage with obstacles humanly insur-
 mountable : but seconded and favoured
 at length by accumulated victories, which
 carried union with dominion, and gave
 arts for liberty, which established gene-
 ral tranquillity, general intercourse, com-
 mon laws and common languages, it pe-
 netrated into the remotest regions with
 not less ease than lustre, and with impres-
 sion suitable to its importance.

SERMON
 XVI.



If the political state of the world was
 thus favourable to the annunciation and
 the success of Christianity, the religious
 and moral distempers of the world at the
 same time called aloud for the immediate
 interposition of it. The monstrous deifi-

T

cations

SERMON
XVI.

~ cations of idolatry, the impious tenets of
contending schools or sects, the gross, the
hypocritical practices of superstition, con-
fused notions mingled with absurd fictions
of futurity, rites mysterious and flagitious,
ceremonies costly and pompous, but frivolous
and vain, devotions utterly unconnected
with purity of heart or sanctity of life, had
banished from the prevailing religion every
rational idea of the Deity or his service.

Corruption intrenched in the same over-
bearing degree on morals. The chief guards,
on which virtue reposed for support in
ancient times, seem to have been civil go-
vernment, a patriotic spirit, and personal
reason, the institutions of wise law-givers,
which were mortal and corruptive like
their authors, a sense of public weal, which
was but a slight barrier against the onsets
of passion, self-love, and the opinions of
private sages, who had no authority to en-
force them. These springs of controul,
at best temporary and precarious, had now
lost

lost their force: morality unknown, rec-
 titude unregarded, pride, revenge, sensu-
 ality, injustice, pursued without awe or
 remorse, make up the general, the painful
 history of that dissolute period; than which
 therefore none can be found more strik-
 ingly marked for the mission of a Divine
 Teacher, to establish righteousness on the
 proper basis of Divine Authority, to clear
 its principles, and strengthen its sanctions.

SERMON
 XVI.

By these and similar reasons, discern-
 ible even to the shortest sight of human
 intellect, may be sufficiently vindicated
 the choice of the place in which, with
 the time when our Saviour declared his
 birth. May they satisfy us that his re-
 velation wants no minute character of pro-
 priety to convince faith, or encourage obe-
 dience; and may they turn our attention
 from its publication to its design, from
 its circumstances to its contents, its mer-
 cies, its truths: its mercies how needed;
 its truths how perfective; its benefits how

SERMON
XVI.

diffusive, comprehending in scheme all mankind, in duration all eternity! God grant that we may entertain a just sense of them, accept them thankfully, apply them carefully, and improve them happily, through Jesus Christ, &c.

S E R M O N XVII.

Preached on EASTER DAY.

ACTS ii.---32.

*This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof
we all are witnesses.*

IN these words is declared, with emphasis, that illustrious event, which this day commemorates; the Resurrection of Christ, the crowning miracle of his power, the leading demonstration of his truth, and of our future fate conformably succeeding it: an event, which involves in it at once our peace here, and our happiness hereafter; his Resurrection being the type of ours, consequently the seal of our justification, and the pledge of our immortality.

T 3

The

SERMON
XVII.

or The physical possibility of such an event, or the practicability of a human resurrection, who, that reflects on God or on nature, will question? We see human, and other, beings taken as it were out of an undistinguishable mass, and moulded and fashioned with all their characteristics into the particulars of their species: we see in the animal world torpid creatures reactivated, and transitory creatures breaking forth from the pellicle of their aurelia state, with acquired glosses and increased powers, into vivacity and enjoyment: we see periodically, at the return of this vernal season, in the vegetable world, the channels of life, which had been shut up by cold, unlocked and resupplied with appropriate circulation, trunks refurnished with their foliage and their buds, herbs with their shoots and their blades, seeds springing up from interment with recruits of strength into all the variegated luxuriance of flowery beauty; and we know farther, by innumerable results of chymical processes, bodies

bodies reproduced, after various disguises, from dissolution.

SERMON
XVII.



Here is repeatedly, if I may so speak, the regular miracle of a sensible resurrection. And is it more difficult, omnipotence presupposed, to renew the human frame, than these objects; to renew and restore the human frame, than to create it; to rouse from a kind of dormitory the insensate elements of a pre-existing composition, than to raise out of nothing the convolved principle of a future agent; to shape it, in infinite instances, with unfailing organism, and unite it with a capacity of thought? Is it more difficult to recal into association the constituent parts, which individuate and perfect man, than to recover dormant energies and hidden qualities into that temperament, which gives an animal action and completion; or the divided or distant particles of inert matter into that arrangement, which gives a plant its verdure, or a flower its hues and its essences?

SERMON
XVII.

It may be said, perhaps, that these renovations are orderly, in the stated progress of existence. And why may not the personal renovation of the human race in an immortal state be a finishing product in a series of changes, under the same infinite intelligence, which delights not in annihilation; which may, which must, watch over every portion of being till its destiny be completed, and which cannot want the power to make any fiat of its will effectual?

But it is not on analogies, however illustrative, or on arguments of possibility, however conclusive, that the resurrection of our Saviour, from which we presage our own, stands ultimately established: it is a revealed fact dependent on testimony. "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof, 'saith St. Peter of himself and his colleagues,' we all are witnesses." Let us consider therefore, to fix the authenticity of this fact, the fundamental requisites which sustain

sustain it; the character of the witnesses, and the quality of their attestation.

SERMON
XVII.

And, I. the witnesses of the resurrection possessed a probity, which is in all human judicatures a received criterion of veracity. They write with a visible aim to form piety by just sentiments, and to enforce it by proper sanctions. What they recommended in precept, they exemplified in practice. They were noted for devotion, meekness, purity of morals, and self-denial. Their Jewish and Gentile adversaries both pay an involuntary tribute to their virtue; by forbearing to arraign which, they indirectly commend it. They are therefore distinguished by a character, which should exempt them from suspicion.

But further, their want of motives to project a falsehood, is an additional security that they attested a truth. The procedure of reason cannot be without views. Imposture is plainly the mean to an end;
this

SERMON
XVII.

this end invariably some proposed acquisition of honour, emolument, or pleasure.

Now it is absurd to imagine the apostles actuated in the present instance by either of these influences. Not to insist on their indigent state, naturally estranged from ambition, which implies some comprehension of fancy, with some elevation of ideas, the presumptive result of education, it is evident, that respect to human praise could not be the impellent in their conduct; since they attributed uniformly to a superior agent, whose gifts alone they imparted, whose approbation alone they consulted, and in whose hands they were professedly but passive instruments, the only distinctions which could advance their repute, the wisdom discovered in their doctrines, and the power displayed in their miracles. When the people of Lystra were just ready to express their reverence of St. Paul by divine honours, he disclaimed them with warmth; and afterwards, when those, who would have adored him as a God, stoned him as a malefactor;

(Acts

(Acts iv. 10.) he was contented to be their victim, rather than their idol. Nor could their attempt be, with more probability, the dictate of policy, pursuing aggrandisement or enrichment. Could they, with the least forecast, expect to promote any project of temporal interest, by avowing the revival of a crucified Master; when the stain of his blood was yet fresh, and the rage of the Jews unquenched by the effusion of it; when all, who honoured his name, were either excommunicated and insulted, or derided and vilified. And that pleasure could not be their aim, is manifest; because, renouncing every accommodation, they were sure to incur every inconvenience: and because they persisted to propagate, in the midst of hardships, what they had resolved to declare in defiance of menaces.

SERMON
XVII,
~~~~~

Even supposing however, they could prosecute without a motive a design, which they had contrived without principle; still they wanted abilities to execute



SERMON  
XVII.

cute it. They were poor and illiterate, unpractised in intrigues, unsupported by authority or credit, unassisted by address: with these defects they can scarcely be conceived capable of managing a fiction, which was to make its way through the disbelief of some, the scepticism of others, and the scrutiny of all,

But admitting still farther, that they had, with courage to attempt, dexterity to manage it; yet how could they flatter themselves with the prospect of success: whilst their conduct was watched with all the diligence of malice embittered by fear, whilst their professed enemies were urged by the weightiest reasons to expose, what they had means to examine with the minutest accuracy, and time to detect?

Nay, put the case, that the apostles were subtle enough to plan, and fortunate enough to disguise, the imposture; still however, they must be considered as men,  
possessed

possessed with the sensibilities, influenced SERMON  
XVII. by the passions of their species. And, in this view, it is morally impossible, that they should be so far divested of self-love, as to disregard their own preservation; that they should defy all that humanity dreads or shuns, exchanging safety for danger, ease for distress, enjoyments for persecutions, in the defence of a known falsehood void of probability; which, after provoking implacable adversaries here, would expose them, according to their own creed, to the punishment of an offended Deity hereafter.

II. But again, the nature of their attestation renders it credible; its object a matter of fact, of which they had ocular evidence. "That which they had seen with their eyes, which they had looked on, declare they unto us," 1. John. i. 1. And that they were not deceived, we gather with certainty; since Jesus had been long known to them before his death by intimate intercourse, and since their re-  
spect

SERMON  
XVII.

spect for him as an instructor, their love of him as a friend, their compassion for him as a sufferer, had, no doubt, deeply engraved the lineaments of his person in their memories. He presented himself too, not many years, but three days, after his absence; when it was impossible that they should have forgot his countenance. He appeared to them not once, or twice, but at various times; not suddenly and transiently, but permanently, in familiar conversations. And it is observable, that the apostles themselves, with all their inducements to expect, with all their interest to wish, the fact, were yet backward in believing it: not Thomas only, whose diffidence rose to peremptory scepticism; but others likewise, who, when assured by different relations that he was restored to life, received the intelligence with joy, but with a mixture of surprize and solicitude; suspended between hope and fear, treating with cold inattention the intimation of the two Disciples, who had conversed with him in their way to a village in the country; and,

and, at his first manifestation in a General SERMON  
XVII. Assembly, rather terrified; than convinced; concluding from the supposed inconsistency of his apparent return with his real exit, "that they had seen a spirit." He, therefore, justified his resurrection by every demonstration fitted to obviate their scruples. He ate and drank with them; He commanded them to handle him; they saw his actions; they felt his wounds; they heard his discourses. And thus, by the provident dispensation of God, their caution adds strength to the cause, and their incredulity is a corroborative proof of their veracity.

Their testimony is besides delivered with an uniformity, which renders it doubly valuable; as a security, that the authors of it were neither corrupted, nor deceived. The regular, the eligible method of tracing the falsity of a deposition, is obviously that of interrogating severally and separately the witnesses, to sound for contradiction: if they are found to concur,  
not



SERMON  
XVII.

not only substantially, but even in minute circumstances, their assertion claims irresistibly on assent. Now of the coincidence in the accounts of the resurrection we may be easily satisfied, by consulting the gospels; which, though penned at different times and in different places, yet harmonise with curious exactness in the relation both of the fact itself, and of its essential particularities. From this consideration we must exculpate them from the suggested charge of being corrupted.

And the agreement of so many may be employed as a farther proof, that the resurrection was no illusion, which depended for existence, only on ideal vision; the known variety of human sensations making it impossible, that deceptions of fancy should extend beyond individuals, with any comprehension of collective numbers. Had the appearance of our Saviour then been confined to one or two apostles exclusively; the pretence might be specious, that it was only the effect of delusion,

lusion, and no real object of sense. But SERMON  
XVII. since, after a preparatory notice to some, he at last solemnly revealed himself to all, continuing with them publicly, conversing with them repeatedly; who can conceive, that so many should remain, for so long a time, in unvaried and unsuspected fallacy, under the fascination of enthusiasm? Besides, he afterwards appeared at once to five hundred: and how could such a number of different ages, sexes, temperaments, be at the same instant struck with the same imagination?

Add farther, if they had been deceived by distemper, or vain chimerical persuasion operating on an ungoverned fancy; as it is impossible, that the mind so affected should for a considerable period act regularly, there would have been some discoveries of that indisposition in their actions. Yet in the course of their lives there occurs not the least appearance of extravagance; but zeal tempered with prudence, innocent simplicity without folly,

U

and

SERMON  
XVII.

and a conversation becoming their great office. Of this, both the conversions which they effected, and even the oppositions which they incurred, present unquestionable evidence. Had they betrayed symptoms of a perverted intellect, their followers, many distinguished by superior wisdom, must have dismissed without regard their pretensions; whilst their enemies could not but have considered them as worthy of compassion, rather than of hatred: they would never, in short, have been embraced by the one as instructors, or arraigned by the other as criminals.

Yet again; the witnesses of the resurrection sealed their attestation with their blood. When called before the Sanhedrim, they avowed their persuasion with undaunted courage; when threatened with the punishment of disobedience, they persevered in the propagation of it with unremitting diligence. They ended a painful life in an ignominious death, the effect of their inflexibility. Now, is it conceivable,

able, that mere love of their dead Master, had he continued unrestored in the grave, could have animated them to suffer for the honour of his name? Having promised, that he would rise the third day, to ascend into heaven, where he would make them partakers of his glory; had he not fulfilled his promise, could they have preserved their reverence for a deceiver? Would not disappointment have unhinged their attachment; and their regard terminated in indignation? This last proof therefore confirms all the rest. If a person of clear fame report an assertion, which he immutably maintains with the loss of his life; can we reasonably doubt of its certainty?

There is a farther consideration among the evidences of our Lord's resurrection, tending to establish the reality of it, which is not to be overlooked; the attestation of others as well as the Disciples. The soldiers, who watched at the sepulchre to secure his body, they who felt the earth trembling under them, and who saw the countenance



SERMON  
XVII.

of an Angel like lightening; even some of these "came into the city, and shewed unto the Chief Priests all the things that were done," Nay, by advancing the incredible story, that his adherents had removed him in the night by a clandestine theft, an expedient which, considering their timorous character, in their dejected situation, together with the strictness of the Roman discipline, they were neither likely to attempt, nor conceivably able to execute, the Jews themselves employed such a weak artifice to suppress the truth, that they in effect exalted and corroborated it,

The last recommendation of the Apostles, tending to authenticate their account, is furnished by God himself; who gave a concurrent testimony to their fidelity by investing them with miraculous powers. They cured the maimed, healed the diseased, revived the dead, and received, by a sudden infusion, a knowledge of all languages, enabling them to instruct all nations;

nations; in short, performed such works SERMON  
XVII. and displayed such attainments, as must be derived from the Sovereign of nature, conferring assistance on appointed servants, for the promulgation of an approved religion.

Upon the whole it appears, that the fact, which is the triumphant pretension, and pre-eminent evidence of Christianity, is recommended by the strongest marks of credibility, which God could properly give, or man reasonably expect; that it is attested by a number of convinced and competent judges, offering every satisfactory assurance of veracity.

I will conclude with observing, that the resurrection of our Lord is not only an important truth, which yields a high satisfaction in speculation; but a principle of action likewise, which ought to influence conduct. As a testimony of completed atonement, which ensures the acceptance of imperfect services, it is a strong incite-

SERMON  
XVII.

ment to the practice of virtue ; as a pledge of assisting grace, which will supply the defects of human abilities, it is an useful preservative against irresolution and anxiety : as it presents us with the idea of a divine intercessor quitting earth for heaven, it must add life to our prayers, and sublimity to our affections. An impressed sense of his offered merits will naturally engage us, to “ draw near to the throne of grace with full assurance of faith : ” a just reflection on his resumed glory must necessarily transfer our regards from this inferior stage of existence to a better, the place of our destination ; where sufferings will terminate in joys, and goodness obtain the reward of perseverance.

In a word, it is not sufficient that we glance over the notice of this fundamental article of the Christian Religion with a desultory, uninterested, inefficient attention. We must be actuated with that powerful persuasion of it, which will render us universally obedient to a glorified Redeemer ;

deemer; who remarks here, and will requite <sup>SERMON</sup> hereafter, all his faithful servants. We <sup>XVII.</sup> cannot seriously believe his resurrection, without embracing his doctrine, we cannot embrace his doctrine, without desiring that felicity which it promises; and we cannot truly desire that promised felicity, without practising the sincere conformity to his commands, which is the introductory qualification expressly conditioning the enjoyment of it.



---

## S E R M O N XVIII.

---

H E B. iv. --- 16.

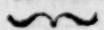
*Let us, therefore, come boldly unto the Throne of Grace; that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

SERMON  
XVIII.

**T**HERE is no subject of our Religion more important, there is no subject in our day more abused, more scoffed at by the unbeliever, or more misapplied by the fanatic, than the Doctrine of Grace; that secret supply of spiritual strength, which frail man wants to make him upright, and keep him stable in the discharge of his duty; that merciful aid from above, which the words now read to you authorise him to expect, and exhort him to implore. It is therefore a subject, deserving peculiarly the investigation, and recommending itself accordingly without other apology

logy to the candid reception of the present assembly.

SERMON  
XVIII.



That there is in believers the operation of a sanctifying principle, preparing, and assisting them to produce and mature the fruits of holiness, distinct from mere moral endowments, distinct from improvements of nature simply human, distinct from the bare influence of ordinary instruction; that it is in short the working of God within them, is a position, which all, who read the Scriptures, readily understand; and none, who credit them, will controvert. Take for proof of this position the explicit assurance of our Saviour, that "his heavenly father would give the holy spirit to every one that asked him;" and that, by this spirit, "he himself would be with us to the end of the world;" from this circumstance styling him the "other comforter, who should abide with us for ever."---Take another proof in the testimony of St. Paul, who speaks with conformity to the language of his master, that we "are led by the spirit, and through the spirit are strengthened with  
might

SERMON  
XVIII.

might in the inward man:" and, again,  
"are washed, and sanctified, and justified in  
the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by  
the Spirit of God." Declarations these full  
and cogent! Why should we distrust them?

Unprejudiced reason discerns at once in  
our infirmities the necessity, and, with the  
necessity, the credibility of this spiritual in-  
fluence; though the separate working, and  
precise manner of it, be secrets beyond  
the fathom of its philosophy. The con-  
nexion between causes and effects is often  
perceptible and certain; where the opera-  
tion of the one, or the production of the  
other is undiscovered. In all the pheno-  
mena of nature this is observable. The  
functions of life, the textures and forces  
of material objects, vegetation, colours,  
sounds, are all, immediately or remotely, the  
result of invisible, and indefinable princi-  
ples. We know the natural instruments  
of vegetation, but how they produce it,  
we cannot define: we know that light gives  
shapes, distances, colours to the creation;  
and

and that sounds are excited by the vibrations of the air; but how they occasion these different sensations, is a mystery impenetrable. We know by inward experience, that the mind actuates the body, and that the body affects the mind; yet philosophy will not take upon itself to pronounce how. Why then may not spirit act upon spirit, as well as upon body; the great, omnipresent, infinite spirit upon the spirit, which his workmanship hath formed, and his guardianship sustains, by a mode of operation, adapted to his subject, and his purposes; not less real, though inexplicably remote from conception. In truth, it is unphilosophical, as well as irreligious, to suppose the contrary.

SERMON  
XVIII.

Credible however as the doctrine here deduced is from reason, seconding the decision of Scripture, and comfortable as it appears on a fair view of our wants; yet it hath not obtained universally in belief a proper peaceable possession. Error hath misconstrued it, licentiousness hath depraved it, arrogance hath misapplied



SERMON  
XVIII.

plied it. And these false pretensions, or false conceptions have thrown impediments in the way of its credit; which therefore we cannot clear more pertinently, or illustrate more serviceably, than by a careful examination of them.

I. It hath been suspected of inconsistency with the nature of man, whom his Maker hath endowed with the characteristic faculties of intelligence, a capacity of discerning good from evil, by which he becomes morally triable; and of free-will, a power of choosing or refusing, acting or forbearing, by which he may become judicially accountable. Were this suspicion just, it would press on the doctrine insurmountably. For to suppose, that God could implant faculties, yet supersede or obstruct the use of them, that he can impose constraint on a probationer for his favour, whom he holds accountable for his actions; is, to derange and darken creation, to shock every natural notion of his counsels and our morality. A Being so acting cannot

cannot be wise, a Being so acted upon cannot be virtuous: a Being so acting, by making the deed his own, appropriates to himself the responsibility of it; a Being so acted upon can incur neither praise nor blame, but pity only, being a mere instrument, whose rectitude is impression, and whose errors are misfortunes.

SERMON  
XVIII.

This must be admitted. But is determination then necessarily implied in assistance, or force in influence? Cannot an Omniscient Inspector of mind prepare it for instruction, awaken it to thought, dispose it to examination, enlighten it with knowledge, present to reason arguments, to imagination warnings, to the passions objects or sensations of delight, to resolutions encouragements, to infirmity supports; yet leave each at liberty to work with native energy? If created, if human spirits can sway each other by argument, by advice, by monition and persuasion; cannot He, who imparted all the powers, and all the organs of intercourse, which they

SERMON  
XVIII.

they possess, address himself to those powers, and maintain with them through those organs a correspondent intercourse, a rational communication ; yet without invading their birth-right or free agency ? Cannot he aid us spiritually, as he preserves us naturally, with a secret superintendence, by materials and methods of nutrition, which we may apply or reject, improve or frustrate ?

II. The next misconception of the doctrine is in the extenuation of depravity. There are, who yield to temptation on the idea of not having grace sufficient for resistance ; there are, who indulge in known habits of vice on the expectancy of some instantaneous interposition of grace to effect their reformation ; there are, who continue in sin, that grace may abound, that the glory of the helper may be illustrated in the victorious efficacy of the help. The first are frail, because they are remiss ; their principle is irresolution : the principle of the second is, if they suggest against belief, guile ; if not, folly ; they prefer  
captivity

captivity to conflict, or they mistake reluctance for impotence, or they would have an end without means, advantage without application, performance without exertion. Presumption actuates the third class; they set the secret dispensations of God at variance with his promulged laws, and convert an intended restorative into a poison.

SERMON  
XVIII.  
~~~~~

In the mean time it is hard, that the Doctrine should suffer in estimation by conceits, which all its sober advocates disclaim as incidental and deformed appendages, without foundation in reason or Scripture. For by reason we are instructed to think, that we are constitutionally capable of duty, and bound to observe it; that attainments must be produced by attempts, and the correction, as the acquisition, of habits by the gradual process of repeated acts, settling into permanent inclinations; that a considerate being cannot mean to encourage improvidence, that a benevolent or just being cannot exact what he knows to be from incapacity in the agent impracticable; and that in the eye of an holy being,

SERMON
XVIII.

being, sin, on whatever pretext, continued, must be an odious, the more aggravated by continuance the more odious, offence to his purity, and defiance of his vengeance.

By Scripture we are called upon in numerous precepts, expostulations, promises and threats (which, without the power of resisting sin, or under any possible allowance of indulging it, would be solemn banter) to “eschew wickedness, to depart from iniquity, to abstain from all appearance of evil;” are exhorted to “grow in grace, to be strong in it, to go on to perfection;” expressions which unanswerably refute the sanguine confidence of instant or indefeasible conversion: and are told yet farther, that “from him who hath not, or who improveth not, his allotted ability shall be taken away, even that which he hath,” even the portion which he possesseth: it follows, that, instead of increased abundance, a diminution of spiritual succour hangs in prospect over the persisting

persisting negligence of habitual transgressors.

SERMON
XVIII.



III. The preceding abuses of the doctrine need no further animadversion. More frequent, and more notorious, is the misapplication of it by enthusiasm to the high claims of immediate inspiration, felt emotion, and assured, unfailing sanctity.

Immediate inspiration, or a constant internal light of personal revelation, is (if I misunderstand not a set of men, who speak too warily, to speak clearly) the tenet of the Quakers : a tenet, undefined, unfounded, unproved, and arrogant or useless. For, is this personal revelation the general lot of all, or the partial prerogative of a few only ? Is the purpose of it, to inculcate old truths, or disclose new ones ; to enlarge, or interpret, the Gospel ? If general, to enlarge the Gospel by new truths ; it sets aside or vilifies the Word of God, as too defective for guidance : if partial, for the interpretation of the Gospel to rude under-
X standings ;

SERMON
XVII.

standings ; in what points of saving knowledge or practice is such interpretation wanted : or, are there not commentators or instructors competent for the office, without the perpetual expence of a miracle ? But whatever may be the extent, or the purpose, of this peculiar illumination ; from what promise is it deduced, or with what evidence authenticated : for a mere assertion of its reality, or assumption of its expediency, is a begged question ? It appears at the same time, useless in fact, not producing uniformity of faith, nor, consequently, security from error. For as well the pure believers, as the carnal impugnors, of it, have their acknowledged varieties, their known repugnances, of religious opinion : which one cannot conceive to happen under the real dictature of immediate inspiration.

Akin to this tenet in principle, though altered in form, is that of another set of men ; who pretend to I know not what perceptible impressions, raptures, pangs, extasies,

tafies, in the reception of the spirit. They will recount to you its beginnings and its workings, its distinct impulsion and intestine agitation, in the process of their New Birth; with the minute particularity of a mechanical movement, or physical experiment. Ask them, in what precise manner they are affected; they reply, that it is incommunicable: ask them how, by what certain token, they distinguish what affects them, to be the operation of the spirit; they reply, that they know it by the peculiarity of it: dispute the proof, and they resolve it into feeling. In arguing with these feelings, (a hopeless undertaking!) I can only say, that I trace no suggestion of them in the Scriptures; that our Saviour in his discourse with Nicodemus plainly intimates the influence of the spirit to be intelligible, not sensible; and that we are referred for the test of it, in other passages, not to sensations, but to effects, to good dispositions and good actions. This with evident propriety. For in feelings, if too plain to be mistaken, would be marks of distinction;

SERMON
XVIII.

partial to those who were indulged with them, discouraging to those who were not : and if not too plain to be mistaken, delusion is possible, a spurious origin of them (as I conceive their usual origin to be) from distemper, or whim, from the mopings of melancholy, the phantoms of anxiety, or the fervours of desire inflamed into persuasion : if again resistible, they may aggravate sin without certain advantage to virtue : but if irresistible, or nearly so, they reduce proportionately, with the freedom, the value, of right faith, or right conduct. In morals alone is no ground for exception : in morals alone are the determination of choice, and, with the true method of discerning, the true method of demonstrating, the assistance of Heaven.

Another enthusiastic inference from the revealed intercourse of the spirit is, an assurance of salvation, without miscarriage, by sanctity without defect. But on what pretext is this privilege assumed ? It cannot be a condition of salvation ; of which
it

it declares the certainty, and presupposes SERMON XVIII. the capacity: it cannot be an essential of religion; because all, to whom religion equally refers, cannot possess it: it cannot be a motive of duty; because, by taking away a principal prompter of diligence, fear, it encourages negligence: and it is contrary to all our notions of our mortal, or Christian, state. In our mortal state, if not the whole of our existence, must be conceived some scheme of preparation for a future division of it by improvement or trial: improvement implies imperfection, trial temptations; both exclusive of security from danger. The scriptural representations of our Christian state uphold the same conclusion; it is resembled to a race for a prize, which, till the prize be obtained, must be unfinished, consequently dubious; and to the expectancy of an inheritance, which, till actual possession take place, must be defeasible. St. Paul laboured, subsequently to his conversion, with strenuous solicitude, "left he might, after all, be a cast-away:" and we are admonished with-

SERMON
XVIII.

out discrimination of persons, "to work out our salvation with fear and trembling," which surely infers a possibility of lapse; "not to grieve the spirit," which surely infers a possibility of provocation; and "to endure, or persevere, unto the end," which surely infers a possibility of remissness or failure.

I will conclude with remarking, what I have reserved all along for separate mention; that to several of the wild opinions, noted in the foregoing strictures, the text, which at once encourages and regulates the expectation of spiritual communication, furnishes itself a proper reply: in the intimation, that "in time of need may be found grace for help." To suppose, that God will not grant what is necessary, is to derogate from his goodness; to suppose that he will bestow what is unnecessary, is to impeach his wisdom. Exigents are accordingly the calls, necessity is the measure of this precious gift. Hence amongst the first Christians was vouchsafed occasionally, for special

cial purposes, a special degree of it : a pro- ^{SERMON}
 felyte, particularly wanted in the plan of ^{XVIII.}
 Providence, was irresistibly and instantane-
 ously converted. To guide the delivery of
 truth, the Apostle had his immediate in-
 spiration ; the martyr, to animate his con-
 stancy, his felt transport and known assu-
 rances. But hence too, for the same rea-
 son, we receive not the dispensation ; be-
 cause ordinary means, with ordinary as-
 sistance, are sufficient without it for all our
 necessities of conduct, or comfort : hence
 again, presumably, pretence to it must be
 the deceit of knavery, or the self-delusion
 of folly.

Improving, therefore, the advantages
 which we have, and neither arrogating nor
 regretting those which we have not ; let
 us proceed, with regular and circumspect
 advances, in the path of true virtue, to
 the possession of true felicity, through Je-
 sus Christ, &c.

and proposed a special theory of it as proposed
by the philosopher, who is the plan of
the science, was necessarily and instantaneously
only of nature. To guide the delivery of
the science, the Apostle had his knowledge in
himself; the matter to which he con-
sidered it his duty to add was the
science. But he did not for the first time
for we receive not the discipline; he
could only mean, which is why at
distance the further we go, for all are
accustomed to conduct, we cannot, hence
again, the discipline, because as it must be
the first of science, on the left of the
of folly.

Improving, therefore, the science
which we have and which we are
regarding those which we have and
are regarded, with regard to the
science in the first of the science,
the position of the first of the science,
the first of the science.

THE PRINCIPLES OF

A

C H A R G E

TO THE

C L E R G Y

OF THE

ARCHDEACONRY of BEDFORD,

DELIVERED AT HIS

PRIMARY VISITATION.

REV. BRETHREN,

A T our first meeting, before I have ^{CHARGE.}
distinctly considered my new re-
lation to you, before I am sufficient-
ly instructed, in your peculiar concerns,
or in the reference and comprehension of
my charge; what should properly be the
subject

CHARGE. subject of my introductory address? Complaint might be unreasonable; admonition, particular admonition unnecessary; direction, local or personal, inapplicable. Our intercourse must therefore, like that of commencing acquaintance, open with a general topic. And what more pertinent, more suited to our common views, more engaging, or deserving of solicitude, more important in discussion, or more practically useful in application; than the origin of our function, in the great command delivered by our Master to his Apostles, just before his final departure from earth. "Go (says he) and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo! I am with you always even unto the end of the world."

On this commission rests ultimately the foundation of ours. I have always considered it as pre-eminent among the internal authentications of the Gospel; as presenting

senting, on close inspection, a marked cre-^{CHARGE.}
 dential, that the Gospel is really, according
 to pretension, the word of God imparted
 by his Son. For it imposeth, with solemnity, in an authoritative tone, an enterprise of high import and large compass, remarkable in every part, whether we fix our point of view on its quality, its instruments, or its issue. Let me take along with me, my reverend Brethren, your candid attention, whilst I unfold somewhat minutely these particulars; that we may see forcibly the result, in the illustration of his character, and our duty.

I. The tone of the commission is authoritative. Who, but a real delegate from heaven, would dare to use it? Who, without a privity to the will of the Supreme Being, a consciousness of his own veracity, and a thorough certainty, that what he projected was proper, and what he proposed would be accepted, that what would be accepted would be accompanied with powers sufficient for the execution of it, could think of
 injoin-

CHARGE. injoining such a ministry in such an undertaking; a ministry, which, apart from the preceding convictions, he must know to be inadequate, in an undertaking which he must expect to be unsuccessful: a ministry too, which must derive on the agents uncompensated misery in an undertaking, which must eventually, on experiment, convict the author of imposture?

II. This undertaking was to teach or to make Disciples of all nations, to bring them over to the christian faith by tuition, to initiate them into the christian community by baptism, and to fix them in the practical observance of christian duties by the authority of their Saviour. A command so ample and complex carries in its very aspect a lineament of divine extraction. A sage merely human would probably have contented himself with a restricted intimation of his tenets to his own school or district; a worldly legislator with the prevalence of his laws in his own city or country; a secular sovereign with the sway of his power

power in his own state or its dependencies ; ^{CHARGE.}
an obscure Jew, especially with a respective
communication of truths and blessings, to
the members of his own tribe or commu-
nion. But with an enlarged idea, suitable
to a more elevated character, our master
comprehends in the plan of his institution
all nations : a plan, still farther to impress
its origin, unmeasurably difficult ; whether
we regard the talents which it required, the
obstacles which it must encounter, or the
doctrine which it was about to establish.

The talents requisite for it were, on the
lowest estimate, knowledge beyond ordina-
ry attainments, energy beyond ordinary
powers, and fortitude beyond ordinary ex-
ample. To teach all nations, it was ne-
cessary to converse fluently or intelligibly
in all languages ; a faculty, which no per-
sonal application could produce, an acqui-
sition which no created intellect could na-
turally retain. To teach all nations, im-
plied in the next place, an explanation of
pretensions to disciples, and a confirmation
of

CHARGE. of them to strangers: for which ends it would be expedient to address singly every individual in all nations. But this was not possible: a qualification therefore, supplementally necessary in the conductors of the undertaking to evidence their veracity, and to engage numbers collectively in the examination of their declarations, was the ability of working miracles; a prerogative belonging to the Sovereign of nature only. In teaching all nations, it was besides impossible but that various hardships would occur from vague abode, and various perplexities from contumelies, injuries, and hostile opposition; it was therefore necessary, that they should be armed with a zeal, which no allurements could seduce; with a courage, which no danger could dismay; and with a patience, which no suffering could exhaust.

The necessity of these talents will be farther seen in the obstacles, which were to be encountered. The teachers of all nations had before them the qualities and dispositions
of

of the numerous inhabitants in all nations, ^{CHARGE.}
the simplicity of the unlettered, the ferocity of the uncivilized, the pride of the learned, the pertinacy of the prejudiced, the craft of the interested, and the controul of the powerful, all threatening a formidable resistance: they were, after subduing their own inveterate opinions, to combat the inveterate opinions of others; to attack false religion in all its shapes and all its holds, behind the intrenchments of prescription, amidst the auxiliary force of sophistry arguing for it, art decorating it, and authority protecting it. The law of Moses, which had been promulged with the splendid recommendation of Miracles, was to be in part abrogated; the rites of the Jewish temple, which attacked the fancy through the senses, were to be abolished. Heathen superstition was to be exploded, with its mysteries, and its revelries; with all the shew that amused its votaries, and all the gain that interested its dependents: the equal providence of an omnipresent Benefactor was to be substituted for the flattering
ing

CHARGE. ing tutelage of local divinities ; and a simple, spiritual, rational devotion for solemn purifications, costly sacrifices, and ceremonious obeisance : this too, amidst a potent and flourishing people, who might, who did conceive their system to be connected by influence with their prosperity, or by antiquity with their government ; and under a newly settled empire, which would be naturally jealous of innovation.

With a change of religion was to be introduced at the same time a change of manners. Old vices were to be exterminated, new virtues, practicable on new motives, enrolled. Benevolence was to be thrown open from national and personal distinctions, fortitude to be turned from enterprise to suffering, pride to be reduced to a just standard ; magnanimity was to be taught meekness, patriotism humanity, resentment placability, ambition equity, avarice heavenly-mindedness, and libertinism purity : and all this was to be effected at a period, when inclination strengthened by habit

habit, by permissions of law, by opinions ^{CHARGE.}
of sages, by examples of heroes, and even
of the gods themselves, ran violently in an
opposite direction; when wealth, power, ho-
nour, pleasure, engrossed admiration, when
opportunity was the measure of indulgence,
and liberty, high-toned liberty, impatient
of controul, the spirit of action.

And what was the doctrine designed to
effect this revolution? That of a Saviour,
who came from heaven by a conception
contrary to nature, to open a way thither;
after a revival from the grave, contrary to
probability; to open a way thither, by a
plan of redemption, which many would
not comprehend, and others would not
think necessary: who performed mira-
cles which were to be acknowledged on re-
port; who prescribed duties, which might
strike with sublimity, nor with difficulty
less; who held out promises protracted, re-
versionary, contingent, and admitted on
trust only, in a future world; who was
descriptively, the native of that distant fu-
ture world, yet, in appearance, by birth a
Y mortal

CHARGE. mortal, by condition an inferior mortal, by habit of life a wanderer, by projection a deceiver, by persecution a malefactor, and by crucifixion (according to the ideas of that era) the worst or meanest of malefactors.

III. The instruments selected for the propagation of this doctrine were alike unpromising : not politicians deep in intrigue, not courtiers practiced in address, not scholars profound in erudition or fluent in eloquence, not projectors with wealth to bribe, with power to awe, with subtlety to insinuate, and with precipitate and rash arrogance to challenge, estimation : but plain men of plebeian extraction and mechanic occupations, rude in parts, in experience, in demeanour ; too low by rank to conceive, too confined by knowledge to concert, and too timid by nature to adventure experiments of ambition ; especially hazardous experiments of capacious ambition, like that of establishing, universally, a spiritual legislation ; in circumstances too not uneasy, their fortunes not desperate, their characters

ters not obnoxious: so that they had com-^{CHARGE.}
 forts to resign, and advantages to forego.

They were besides a very small number of persons, unknown to fame, in possession, as far as appears, only of a single dialect; and of a despised nation, whose manners were, by lofty claims of distinction offensive, and whose religion was, by rigid aversion to intercommunity of worship, odious. Laying together with consideration these particulars, who can help distinguishing in their mission the voice of God: in a cause of such extent, to be managed against such obstacles by such agents, without complete authority to propose it, without Almighty Aid to support it, without infallible guidance to direct it, without special ability to strike light into the understanding, and conviction into the heart, what could the charge suggest, but infatuated presumption, what the prosecution of it but defeat beyond remedy, and disgrace beyond extenuation?

IV. The issue of this singular charge falls next under remark.

CHARGE.

It was accepted with a ductility, and pursued with an alacrity, equal to the dignity and the confidence, with which it was delivered. How shall we account for this circumstance? From worldly temptations of pleasure, honour, or emolument?--- Not, I think, with the least colourable pretence; if we remember the certain sacrifice, in those who obeyed it, of country, friends, repose, accommodation, independence; for insults, dangers, outrages, in the course of a Ministry harrassing by toils, and still more by repulses and distresses derived from malevolence, armed with power, and exasperated by conscious or presumptive discredit. But I may be excused from enlarging on this trite part of my subject.

Shall we then search for the spring of their conduct, or in other words the motive of their undertaking, in priest-craft, statecraft, enthusiasm, or vain-glory? Surely not without absurdity in priest-craft; for, to suppose such a number of priests, or of any persons, sufficiently cunning or sufficiently cautious for the purpose, reposing in each other
such

such confidence, adhering to each other with such union, and abetting and assisting each other with such impenetrable secrecy, as the purpose implied, or the event demonstrated, is an idea repugnant to probability; repugnant indeed to common sense, considering what hath been just intimated, that the Priests of Christianity, few or many, must all, were it false, have suffered by it, and could not have been gainers. State-craft is not more admissible; since what they inculcated was at variance with state-maxims, and not likely to be, as in fact for three centuries it was not, established under any public protection; or permanently countenanced with any public approbation. Of enthusiasm, which we know to be a fire apt to spend itself by its violence, seldom long permanent, and never long regular and consistent, there is not a trace in their writings or actions; unless their zeal for their faith be deemed such, which is apparently a begged question. Besides that, enthusiasm could not conceivably effect all, each individual of the whole class, in the same degree, and with the

CHARGE.

CHARGE. fame conceit : or, even if it could, would not furnish them with the supernatural helps necessary for their design ; the languages, by which they must and did publish, the foresight, by which they must and did regulate, and the works, by which they must and did authenticate, their extraordinary commission. From enthusiasm shall we turn to vain glory : assigning fame for their scope, and uncommon desire of it for their impulse ? But fame, as an acquisition of their own efforts, must still be uncertain, and, as depending on the capacity of their proselytes to raise them into celebrity, yet more uncertain. The uncertainty increases on the notion of imposture, which infamy would follow with a probability proportionate to that of detection : or exclusively from these circumstances, considering the opposition inevitably imminent, as they could not naturally hope for any great multitude of proselytes, considering too the number of their coadjutors, amongst whom would be divided in equal, or common participation, the praise of their project

ject, the same, if any, acquired by them, ^{CHARGE.}
must be inconsiderable; and, at the same
time, of little value to those who were
not only estranged from ideas of it by edu-
cation, but who rejected it in pretension,
and slighted it in fact, by not deducing
or seeking from it any personal advantage,
by risking frequently their very title to
it in an undisguised confession of failings,
and by constantly referring what they said
or did to the glory of a leader in the ser-
vice of God, with the sole claim of being
regarded as subordinate and ministrant
parties, the mere workmen of a master
builder.

The preceding suppositions all unsatis-
fying, what remains, but that we resolve
their doctrine into truth, their behaviour
into the energy of conviction? On this
ground alone their zeal becomes recon-
cileable with propriety, prompt and pro-
vident, tenacious and rational.

I might trace progressively to illustrate
the commission of Christ, and its issue, more

Y †

fully,

CHARGE. fully, the remarkable success of it in the swift propagation of his faith; which, without delay, without disguise, without preparative contrivance of art, easily and diffusively insinuated itself in the very place, which had in possession all the memorials of its author. From thence it penetrated almost instantaneously through Palestine; from thence, in a short term, with a sweep and efficacy peculiar to itself, above two thousand miles from its source to Rome: hence onward with various transitions, but with rapidly increasing influence, for three hundred years; 'till on the ascent of Constantine to the Imperial Throne, when it obtained a regular establishment, it had pervaded almost all the regions of the known world. And whatever the Emperor might be, (for whether he was not the protector, before he was the proselyte, of the Church, opinions justly differ) his subjects were, a moiety at least, if not a majority, of them Christians.

This

This evolution of Christianity, this un-^{CHARGE.}
ceasing expansion of it, compared with the
obscurity of its origin, and the frequent
asperity of its treatment, is truly astonish-
ing. Interest struck at it, and it grew :
curiosity scrutinized it, and it spread : ma-
lignity trampled upon it, and it rose reinvigo-
rated. Like imperial Rome itself, with the
same irresistible prevalence, but with greater
celerity, it extended and aggrandized itself
by acquisition upon acquisition ; till it sub-
dued the world, or brought a large part of
mankind under its persuasion. How shall
we solve this extraordinary event ? What
cause not supernatural, what intervention
less than omnipotent can, with satisfaction,
explain this successful progress of our reli-
gion ? Success, simply considered, is un-
doubtedly no absolute proof of rectitude,
or supernatural support. It may be ob-
tained by human exertion : Mohammed
obtained it by the sword. But success, like
that of the Apostles, in a transaction of
such magnitude, with uncommon feeble-
ness opposed to uncommon force, in nu-
merous conversions, at a time when their
reports

CHARGE. reports were readily investigable, conversions of all sorts of persons, some surely inquisitive and able thinkers, incapable of adopting, without conviction, a Creed, which demanded a total change of religious sentiment and moral practice, credibly manifests a heaven-planned scheme, promoted in prosecution by heaven-sent succours.

Let us, therefore, transfer to them the eulogy bestowed with much less propriety on a certain distinguished hero, that they were instruments "in conducting such arduous achievements, as man would scarcely dare to attempt, and God only could accomplish." But this eulogy, a merited tribute, let us not prove in effect, by practical negligence, a barren compliment of admiration. Derived through them we have also a commission less extensive, less laborious, not less sacred, or cogent. If not with equal power, let us discharge it with equal fidelity; instructing, baptizing, dispensing the commands of Christ with an honesty, that neither wrests nor relaxes them, with a simplicity that neither tricks them out in
finical

finical ornaments, nor travesties and dis-^{CHARGE}
graces them by rant, rhapsody, quaintness,
or vulgarism; and with an ability, that not
only explains them learnedly, and defends
them acutely (which supposes due prepara-
tion of study); but that delivers them too
persuasively, and, with this view, accom-
modately to times, persons, and circum-
stances. But above all, let us require in
the Minister of the Gospel the exemplary
instructor. Let him give form, anima-
tion, energy to his documents, by his prac-
tice; by a practice free, not only from
that depravity, which disgraces every seri-
ous pretension, and repels every discreet
access, but from that light dissipation, and
those loose liberties, the distinctive faults
of fashionable manners, which will less
observably perhaps, not less certainly, ob-
struct his utility. This ethic decorum
the world with just expectation demands
from their spiritual guides; the neglect
of it we have sometimes occasion to re-
gret in our younger brethren; when we
find the advantage taken of that neglect
by malignant or designing adversaries, who
work

CHARGE. work against religion by discrediting its professors, or against its professors by discrediting their behaviour; who with less principle, perhaps, but with more circumspection, impose a stricter formality for a purer sanctity, and artfully draw notice to this unguarded side of character, which lies level to the vulgar eye; and a defeat in which is more easily descried, than a compensation or a palliative for it in other ornamental, but less obvious, qualifications.

In addressing these cautionary hints to you, my Reverend Brethren, I would not be understood to found a particular necessity of them in your inadvertence, or to rest the whole force of them on your conduct. I am aware that your conduct, of whatever moment, can have but a partial respect in the import, with an instrumental view to the grand accomplishment of the commission delivered by our Lord. It looks to those connected with you likewise, it lays on these inclusively a serious concern in relative obligations. And much, very
much,

much, depends on their discharge of these ^{CHARGE.}
obligations; on the disposition with which
they receive you, and the assistance with
which they support you. If you be to do
your duty, they are not to forget theirs:
if you be to lead with a proper example,
they are at least to follow; or they have
before them a known track in which they
are to proceed with equal responsibility,
whether they have any exemplary leader
or not.

The wardens of your respective parishes
ought to be in a particular manner your
supporters and coadjutors. Their office
hath acquired, since the reformation, a
conspicuous importance in our ecclesiasti-
cal establishment. Both canons and
statutes concur in arming them with pow-
ers, and investing them with privileges,
both spiritual and temporal. They are
the guardians of the Church in your ab-
sence; they are the superintendants of the
Church even in your presence. The goods
of the Church are committed to their
custody, the poor to their overlooking:
the

CHARGE. the decencies of religious worship, in the reparation of its edifice, the fitness of its accommodations, and the regularity of its performance, fall under their inspection. Even the tutelage of morals is to a certain degree within their sphere: and in the execution of this critical trust annexed to the business of presentments, in which they succeed the old synodal witnesses of our papal ancestors, that they may act with free and fearless fidelity, the law hath expressly enacted some special provisions for their protection. These privileges and these powers let them neither neglect nor pervert, but employ them with distinguishing and meritorious care in aid of their minister and his virtuous endeavours. Instead of stretching their authority with encroachment, or exercising it with insult, let them be firm, but with caution, even in a just cause with courtesy; with an assertion of their own rights, of their own consequence, if necessary, but with some feeling likewise for his reasonable claims and liberal character. Instead of bickering with him captiously, or opposing him

him pertinaciously, on doubtful or slight ^{CHARGE.} grounds; let them add to his comforts, and allow for his infirmities. Instead of leaguings in parties, or machinating attempts, against his property or his fame; let them guard the one, that they may not take from him the respectability (why may I not add too the communicability) of his legal pittance; the other, that they may extend his influence, by which he may extend his utility: or, I might say, perhaps with sufficient comprehension, instead of exploring his faults, let them practise his precepts.

My wish is, in short, that the laity would attend to their respective duties as well as the clergy; and that both may co-operate with christian affection towards their own happiness and the common weal: or, in other words, the significant and beautiful words of an Apostle, that "speaking the truth in love *we* may all grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by

CHARGE. by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love:" that is, as I would render the passage (for the metaphor is not well sustained, or the sense well expressed, in our translation); that "doing, observing, conforming to the truth, with the charity of the Gospel, we may in all parts, and in all points, advance with suitable improvement towards (or grow with suitable increase into) him, who is the head, I mean Christ; from whom the whole body derives direction, and fitly adjusted and compactly fastened together, through every connexion or dependence of the harmonious system, receives growth, or expands with gradual augmentation; 'till it become a finished structure on the principle of love, love to God, including, and demonstrated by, benevolence amongst ourselves.

F I N I S.

10 FEB 60